

weekly worker



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of Left Unity
block left unity



LETTERS



Letters may have been shortened because of space. Some names may have been changed

Transition

Jack Conrad's efforts at dialogue with other radical left currents would be more impressive if he could overcome his knee-jerk anti-Trotskyism ('The spirit of '45', May 9).

He ridicules the *Transitional programme* but is really only addressing the garbled versions presented by some who once upon a time made a pretence of Trotskyism, or even the Socialist Workers Party. As I recall from arguments long ago, the International Socialists/SWP rejected the *Transitional programme* as part of their obsession with the immediate wages struggle at the expense of a political perspective.

Other groups that once held Trotskyist views have proved equally degenerate. So why wheel them in as its advocates now? If they do not tell the truth to the workers, how is that the fault of Trotsky?

Conrad ignores the most important features of the *TP*. Firstly, recognition that a crisis of leadership of the working class existed in the 1930s, on which hung the fate of humanity. This referred to the domination of Stalinism, busy butchering the opposition, and social democracy, joined in a popular front to strangle the revolution (as in Spain). Such a crisis of leadership exists today, albeit with a different configuration of forces.

Secondly, it is the programme that is transitional rather than individual demands; Trotsky referred to a "system of demands" and these are part of a perspective of taking power. The demands are logically connected rather than stages that must be followed sequentially. The *TP* was written in the light of the Russian Revolution at a time when it was entirely plausible to expect fresh revolutionary upheavals, despite the treacherous role of Stalinism. It was necessary to challenge the old leaderships. The demands, a series of steps aimed at taking power, drew on the experience of the Russian Revolution, actual factory committees, workers' control, soviets not just as organs of struggle, but as a foundation of class rule. Likewise, defence guards at factory level, leading to workers' militia and Red Army, emerging out of the needs of class struggle.

Conrad and the CPGB seem to want to collapse all demands into a minimum programme, which is like saying there is no programme at all. It gets worse, as he creates an unprincipled amalgam linking the discussion of programme to the modern-day sects, which keep workers in the dark. There is nothing of this in the *Transitional programme* or Trotsky's writing on the subject. The work of the Left Opposition and the Fourth International was a courageous attempt to tell the truth to the working class and offer an alternative to the systematic betrayals by the Stalinist movement (which had the enthusiastic support of the CPGB of the day). Such an alternative is urgently needed today, but is unlikely to be found in the shape of *The spirit of '45*.

Mike Martin
Sheffield

Real pro

In light of Jack Conrad's article on Left Unity, I would like to revisit something from Mike Macnair's article on Riddell's Comintern translation and from past articles: the false dichotomy of unity with diplomatic or no criticism, and of criticism without unity.

On April 2, there was an *Open Democracy* article, 'Young and good-

looking: the saviours of Europe's left'. Part of this article that really interested me as a professional worker was mixed, that part about being "well-spoken", having "media-friendly manners", "middle class [language] based on references to justice and fairness rather than class", "terms that combine social indignation with the language of justice and democracy" and "packaged in a more middle-class-friendly language".

In the course of professional self-development, I have come to realise that, surely, there has to be a spectrum of criticism that includes forms that facilitate longer-term unity and forms that don't. I agree that diplomatic criticism isn't enough, but surely we should be capable of offering professional criticism - and neither criticism for the sake of criticism nor more amateurish forms (like polemical slurs that only drive people away)! How can there be unity with critical critics or those whose polemical bread and butter are ad hominem? It may have worked in Lenin's day, but it doesn't work in ours.

Professional criticism can be worded in ways like informed concerns, or alarms over another group's lack of due diligence. Surely this is the case in the time-tested and failed reform coalitionism strategy! We should be the ones internalising the political equivalent of due diligence as part of offering professional criticism.
Jacob Richter
email

Last strawmen

Arthur Bough raises strawmen arguments in his total misinterpretation and "projection" on what I was saying about the Soviets and World War II (Letters, May 9). But first the facts.

Arthur repeats: "By 1941 [rather than *in* 1941], the USSR had seen off the Japanese in the largest tank battle ever, to such an extent that Japan decided it was easier to attack the US rather than USSR." This is like saying 'by 1945' the USSR did this. True, but a false picture of events. The Japanese were roundly defeated by 1939, not 1941. The fact they hung out on the border of Siberia didn't mean they were not defeated.

They wanted nothing to do with their old dreams of turning the Soviet Far East (the region east of Siberia) into a Japanese colony. They had too many other irons in the fire: most notably the rising resistance to their occupation of China; secondly, and more importantly, their Far East Asian Co-Prosperity empire, which meant removing the far more important military force(s) in Asia - the US navy and its colonies/base in the Philippines.

Another missive on Arthur's part: he argues that, due to the huge industrialisation of the USSR, "Japan believed the United States was an easier target!" Wow, really? Where does he come up with this stuff? The reason for going after the USA rather than USSR was because it was "easier"? I didn't think Japanese imperialism was quite so *fickle*, Arthur. It was the USA, not the USSR, that represented the biggest obstacle to Japanese territorial expansion in Asia. This is why the Japanese welcomed the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact in 1939. It removed the USSR as an obstacle by being allies with their allies, the Nazis. The Germans were meeting with the Japanese the same day in Berlin that Ribbentrop was in Moscow toasting vodka with the Russians. This allowed the Japanese free reign to take on the US, but not because they were "easier".

The misinterpretation. I never downplayed Russian/USSR industrialisation as the material

basis for the defeat of the Japanese or the Germans. Seriously, the industrialisation notwithstanding, the 1,500 Russian tanks (pre-T34 tanks of light and medium size, if anyone is interested) that defeated the Japanese were largely the result of the lack of armour on the Japanese part and the numbers of Russian and Mongolian troops that were able to envelop the Japanese armies and push them back into Manchuria. The Japanese were at a huge logistical disadvantage in these battles (not all of which the Russians won, but they won the war).

My point was never to de-emphasise the five-year plans or industrialisation. My point was that folks like Arthur only *begudgingly* admit that the aid the US provided played *any* role in the demise of the Nazi war machine. I think this false view makes it seem that the events of World War II, had this aid not been given, would have been no different.

The aid was provided via lend-lease, not Moscow gold, as Arthur contends. The gold he is talking about was based on trade agreements *prior* to the lend-lease that all nations had to pay the US for war material, since the US was a neutral non-belligerent. Once the Germans declared war on the US after Pearl Harbour, lend-lease was passed and then the gold basically stopped flowing. (The same discussion involves Spanish republican gold going to Russia for guns during the revolution there in 1936.)

Could the USSR have survived without its industrialisation and, in my opinion, far more important 'Gosplan' or central planning that allowed the focused allocation of resources to weaponise its economy? Nope. But it is also likely to have raised the iffy proposition of a much longer and harder war, had US aid not been granted throughout the US involvement.

David Walters
email

Hate factories

Rightwing Tory justice minister Chris Grayling's declaration that prisoners would now be made to "earn" basic privileges by "working harder" probably wasn't just the usual 'populist' promise to stick the boot into one of the most powerless and demoralised social groups. During times of economic austerity and potential social unrest, scapegoating marginalised and outcast groups, like prisoners, is always useful as a means of deflecting and refocusing public anger away from the true culprits of the country's economic ruin - in this case Grayling's pals in the City of London. Behind the rhetoric and the guise of 'getting tough' on prisoners is the actual purpose of the prison industrial complex: to turn prisons into privatised forced-labour factories.

Prisoners are, it seems, to become like third-world workers - a source of extremely cheap and compliant labour for multinational corporations. This is a practice which draws its inspiration from the US, where one of the largest prisoner populations in the world has increasingly replaced outside unionised labour as a source of profit. Under the UN Charter of Human Rights, forced labour is, of course, unlawful, but prisoners don't seem to count and, during times of economic crisis and a burgeoning prison population, there is a cold rationale in the capitalist intention to focus its rapacity on those behind bars.

It also harks back to the original purpose of the Victorian-inspired model of what was then a modern prison system: to instil conformity and the work ethic in the rebellious poor. After decades of the 'control and containment' model, prisons are to be

returned to their original function as places where the errant poor are taught their true place as producers of profit for the rich.

The tabloids who cheer Grayling's 'get tough' treatment of prisoners and whip up mob support for him omit to mention or question why prisoners are being forced to do work that its unemployed readers could be invited to do on a legally enforced minimum wage. And, whilst large corporations and companies constantly 'rationalise' their operations by shedding labour and creating unemployment, some of these same companies are using prison cheap labour to top up profits - all with the willing assistance of Grayling and his rich and powerful colleagues in the Tory government.

Not only is prison slave-labour an absolute negation of the basic human rights of prisoners, from whom Grayling has now prevented any legal challenge by stopping legal aid for prisoner litigation cases, but also the removal of a means of employment for many of those outside prison who are influenced by the lies and witch-hunting of the tabloids and an increasingly rightwing political establishment.

Grayling should also ponder this: forcing a slave-labour regime as a condition for basic privileges on prisoners serving increasingly longer sentences might just be a catalyst for some extremely expensive prison repairs further down the line.

John Bowden 6729
HMP Shotts

Sex repression

Eddie Ford's back-page article on the current 'abuse and rape' mania was an anaemic wee effort, taking as it does all the state's terminology and jurisprudence at face value and without challenge ('Fear and harassment as the norm', May 9). He mocks the *Daily Mail*, but his piece could have come straight out of its pages, since he accepts as read all references to 'abuse' and 'rape' as if the way they are being used has universal acceptance.

I don't accept that perfectly consensual and voluntary sexual activity is 'abuse' and 'rape', but it's clear that a great many caught in the current wave of hysteria, sexual outrage and repression are guilty of no more than that. The law they have offended is the arbitrary age-of-consent law, the law that says some anonymous person in the state will decide for us when we can have sex. A voluntary sexual relationship or one-off encounter is not 'abuse', because both parties decide for themselves and defy that anonymous and arbitrary judgment.

It is certainly true that in the 60s and into the 70s this law started to fray at the edges under the pressure of a more enlightened sexual freedom and liberation movement, which was simply ignoring the state and doing its own thing. There was a fairly widespread attitude - sex as long as it was voluntary and consensual was your own business. A whole generation of under-age people were having sex with each other, and whoever else seemed interesting or cool at the time. There were armies of groupies who made it their own private competition to sleep with celebs. Yes, many of the rock stars took advantage of hot young girls jumping into their beds, but this wasn't abuse, this wasn't rape: they were not doing anything against anyone's consent.

What we have now is a witch-hunt, an inquisition by moralists, religious loonies and authoritarians pledged to kill such ideas of sexual freedom and individual liberty. Blair set loose armies of these creatures, along with 'child protection' social policy

evangelists imported from America. There has been wholesale adoption of repressive childcare and anti-libertarian policies, which is starting to permeate every level of society.

The current situation reminds me of scenes from *The crucible*, with widespread accusations of digression against all and sundry. We don't have the public hangings any more, but the press does its best to achieve the same thing without any need for a guilty verdict, never mind what that guilt might actually be. The hapless stars caught in the headlights are victims of this social policy regression which is meeting a widespread compensation culture.

Trip and Stumble no-fee compensation solicitors have ensured millions remember injuries they sustained years ago. They hawk their wares: 'Are you being bullied at work? Is your child being bullied at school? You could receive tens of thousands of pounds.' In this case, the rustle of those thousands in compensation from stars accused of abusing you decades ago is an added incentive.

Now, I'm not saying Savile and on a far smaller scale Hall and possibly others didn't actually abuse young people - clearly they did. Kids who didn't welcome Savile's vile attentions, kids on whom he forced himself. Hall simply let vent his lust without any consideration whatever of the feelings of the victims involved. But those, I dare suggest, are not the bulk of these allegations, which appear to be retrospective judgments - cash or spite-induced by people who voluntarily engaged in sexual activity and now see the chance to make some money and gain some fame from it. There is certainly widespread bandwagon-jumping too: without the need for any sort of corroborative evidence, anyone who had even a chance meeting with Savile, for example, could add their name to the industrial-scale list of accusers in line for big payments from his estate, the BBC and others. This has let loose a feeding frenzy, with solicitors scouring the hedgerows for randy stars, politicians, radio and TV celebs, plus new victims ready to spill the beans on their sexual encounters 20 or 30 years ago.

This is the top end of the repression. At the bottom end a predatory 'child protection' industry, with a rigid code of what is abuse, neglect and rape, conducts mass arrests, child kidnapping and cruel detention. This is state abuse, and it is real abuse. Children snatched from their classrooms, off the streets, banned from talking to parents, siblings or friends.

The accusation is enough. Evidence isn't needed - suspicion will do. Seventy thousand children are now in detention - they euphemistically call it 'care'. The conditions of the stolen children and young adults are far, far worse than the conditions they are snatched from in the vast majority of cases. Meantime hundreds, maybe tens of thousands of children and young people are themselves charged as 'abusers' and 'rapists' for sexual activity, be it ever so mild, with their near peers. Teenagers a year or two years older than their partners jailed and put on the 'sex offenders' register for consensual sex with their girl or boyfriends. Little children below the age of criminal responsibility taken away and punished, brainwashed, subject to mental reconditioning or else put on the 'at risk' register and locked up for innocent childhood sexual games.

Eddie is right: "fear and harassment" are the norm, but not in the way he highlights.

Logan Wilson
Aberdeen

AWL

Pull the other one

In response to Left Unity, the Alliance for Workers' Liberty has sent a counter-proposal to most of the far-left organisations. **Paul Demarty** replies

Comrades, we have received your proposal for a united "transitional organisation" of the left, and read the accompanying explanatory article¹ with some interest. We share many of the concerns you have with Kate Hudson's and Andrew Burgin's Left Unity project and what you call its "flabby search for consensus"; we agree that "there are real differences between the different groupings on the left, about real and important issues," and that "for the labour movement to be able to win socialism, we will need to thrash out those issues and develop a coherent strategy".

In responding to a concrete call for unity such as yours, however, two questions need to be considered: *who* will it unite, and on what *political* basis? It is not the case that both questions need to be answered in a satisfactory fashion, of course - the unity of significant forces on a rotten political basis could be a site of intervention to pursue a more principled programme; and the unity even of two groups as insignificant in size as the CPGB and AWL would - if it represented a *genuine* convergence of views - equally be worthwhile pursuing.

In this case, we do not believe that either condition is met. In the first place, it is exceptionally unlikely that either of the largest groups copied into your email - the Socialist Workers Party and Socialist Party in England and Wales - will find this proposal attractive. It is, moreover, quite unlikely that any of the smaller groups will respond positively either.

We all know that the SWP is extraordinarily reluctant to place its comrades in a position where they will have to "thrash out" issues in open debate, or more broadly admit that groups smaller than itself are worth talking to at all. A similar sniffiness attends to SPEW's relations with other left groups, albeit without the often overt hostility of the SWP. Counterfire simply continues SWP politics to its logical conclusion, and is more interested in alliances with Len McCluskey than groups to its left. Socialist Resistance and the International Socialist Network are committed to building Left Unity, and the latter has already given the AWL a brusque brush-off.² That basically leaves you and us as potential candidates for 'unity'.

In the light of this, it cannot be said that the political basis of your proposal is adequate. You suggest "a coalition of organisations and individuals, organised both nationally and in each locality, which worked together on advocating the main ideas of socialism, working class struggle, democracy and welfare provision; in support of working class struggles; and in such campaigns as it could agree on (against bedroom tax? against cuts?), while also giving space to debate differences".

Well, who could object to "space to debate differences"? The trouble is that we also need to "work together" on issues where the left violently disagrees. To be blunt: there are aspects of AWL politics that we in the CPGB find foul, as you well know. You have provided mealy-mouthed left cover for imperialist bloodbaths in Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya and elsewhere. We are not prepared to restrict ourselves to merely "debating" issues of decisive and immediate strategic importance to the working class.

We are, of course, not opposed to debating *as such*. The trouble is that the AWL, in practical terms, *is* opposed to debating those differences. AWL propaganda on, for instance, the Iraq war came with a whole series of

caveats - the general line, repeated for most imperialist wars, was: 'We do not support the US, but we do not call for them to withdraw'. In logical terms, this is simply saying *nothing* - we don't support the US, but we don't *not* support the US either. In practical terms, it amounts to an attempt to demobilise the anti-war movement, a position for which your comrades *refuse to take responsibility* by obfuscating the essence of the matter with weasel words.

The *ne plus ultra* of this behaviour was Sean Matgamna's infamous 'What if Israel bombs Iran?' article, a truly repugnant apology-in-advance for a hypothetical Israeli war of aggression, which contained formulations barely different in essence from the obsessive Islamophobia of a Sam Harris.³ It was presented by an embarrassed AWL as a "discussion article", which AWL members (apart from a small anti-imperialist minority who subsequently were hounded out of the group) were exceptionally *unwilling* to discuss in any substantial way.

Indeed, as salutary as a call for left unity in action may be, it is impossible to blind ourselves to the nature and history of the organisation which is pursuing it. Comrades, we have been here many, many times before. The AWL's operative political method - right back to the International Communist League days - has been to launch unity offensives with other political groups, as a cover for what are in essence shabby recruitment raids.

The SWP, Workers Power (twice: once upon WP's foundation, more recently via an AWL coup in the National Campaign Against Fees and Cuts), the Alan Thornett group which has ended up as Socialist Resistance - all are spurned suitors to the AWL. You protest that you are on the side of the angels in each case; but this is just a piece of spurious self-exculpation that makes the underlying sectarianism all the more noxious.

As an example from history, your article cites - quite correctly - the foundation of the Communist Party of Great Britain in 1920, which brought together "at least five major groupings

previously at odds with each other, and many individuals and smaller groups", but you miss the other side of the coin. The CPGB was formed by means of uniting different political trends, but also by a whole series of splits.

There would have been no CPGB if the social-chauvinist, Henry Hyndman, and his comrades had remained in charge of the British Socialist Party; if pro-unity elements of the sectarian Socialist Labour Party had not been prepared to split it. Above all, there would have been no CPGB if the *international* communist movement had not enforced a split with social democracy.

For a genuine communist party, or even proto-party, to be founded, splits will again be necessary: to be concrete, the left groups will have to break with the bureaucratic sect regimes that present the most enduring obstacle to unity. The AWL leadership, for all its pretensions to transparency and openness, is precisely such a sect regime.

We are happy to work with AWL comrades on matters in the movement where our views accord *in any case* - no "transitional organisation" is necessary for that. A thorough and open break with the sectarian method you use and pro-imperialist politics you espouse - and the leading clique which maintains both - are preconditions for any 'unity' overture from your organisation to be taken in good faith. Until then, the only possible response to such approaches is extreme scepticism.

Comradely,
Paul Demarty (on behalf of the Provisional Central Committee)

paul.demarty@weeklyworker.org.uk

Notes

1. www.workersliberty.org/story/2013/05/01/how-make-left-unity.
2. www.workersliberty.org/story/2013/05/08/left-must-debate-its-%E2%80%9Cbigs%E2%80%9Ddifferences.
3. www.workersliberty.org/story/2008/07/28/discussion-article-what-if-israel-bombs-iran. Matgamna talks of Iran's "clerical fascist rulers [who] might see a nuclear armageddon, involving a retaliatory Israeli nuclear strike against Iran in the way a god-crazed suicide bomber sees blowing himself to pieces". Not like those hawkish members of the Israeli kneset, who are the very picture of proportion and reason!

Appeal from the editor

Our legal appeal was boosted this week thanks to two substantial donations: a £100 cheque from comrade RG and a £50 PayPal transfer from comrade AN, who writes: "The *Weekly Worker* is an important resource promoting Marxist and communist unity, and the concept of the mass Communist Party we badly need."

That is why he, like so many other readers, is determined that our central message will continue to go out, despite the £1,000 damages plus costs we were obliged to agree after the publication of an inaccurate article last year (see 'Unreserved apology' *Weekly Worker* February 7).

The total raised now stands at £3,530, although, as I pointed out last week, the complainant's solicitors do not seem to be in a hurry to inform us of the sum they wish to claim for their expenses.

While that will be subject to negotiation, it will not be trivial.

You can contribute to the appeal by sending a cheque or postal order, made payable to 'Weekly Worker', to BCM Box 928, London WC1N 3XX; by going to our website and using our PayPal facility; or by transferring your donation directly from your online bank account - our account number is 00744310 (sort code: 30-99-64). Please remember to specify the purpose of the donation.

You can also ask your union branch or other progressive organisation to contribute. Download the draft motion and covering letter from the revolving carousel near the top of our home page. As comrade AN states, our paper is "an important resource" for the movement and it is everyone's responsibility to ensure it continues to do its job ●

Peter Manson

ACTION

CPGB podcasts

Every Monday we upload a podcast commenting on the current political situation. In addition, the site features voice files of public meetings and other events: <http://cpgb.org.uk/home/podcasts>.

London Communist Forum

Sunday May 19, 5pm: Weekly political report from CPGB Provisional Central Committee, followed by open discussion and *Capital* reading group. Calthorpe Arms, 252 Grays Inn Road, London WC1. This meeting: Vol 1, chapter 15, section 4, 'factory'. Organised by CPGB: www.cpgb.org.uk.

Radical Anthropology Group

Introduction to anthropology
Tuesday May 21, 6.15pm: 'Culture as creative refusal'. Speaker: David Graeber.
St Martin's Community Centre, 43 Carol Street, London NW1 (Camden Town tube). £10 waged, £5 low waged, £3 unwaged. Discounts for whole term.
Organised by Radical Anthropology Group: www.radicalanthropologygroup.org.

Save Clapham fire station

Thursday May 16, 6.30pm: Anti-closures protest. Assemble Brixton Fire Station, Gresham Road, London SW9, followed by march to Lambeth town hall for consultation meeting.
Organised by the Fire Brigades Union: www.fbu.org.uk.

Socialist Theory Study Group

Thursday May 16, 6pm: Study of Marx's and Engels' *The communist manifesto* (1848). Social centre, Next to Nowhere, Bold Street, Liverpool 1.
Organised by Socialist Theory Study Group: teachingandlearning4socialism@gmail.com.

No eviction of refused refugees

Friday May 17, 9.30am: Picket, Glasgow Sheriff Court, 1 Carlton Place, Glasgow G5.
Organised by Glasgow Campaign to Welcome Refugees: glascamref@gmail.com.

Making us sick

Friday May 17, 7.30pm: Public meeting, Clapham Library, 91 Clapham High Street, London SW4. 'Health cuts and the LGBT community'.
Organised by Queers Against the Cuts: www.queersagainstthecuts.wordpress.com.

Israeli apartheid

Friday May 17, 7.30pm: Talk by journalist Ben White, Friends Meeting House, 6 Mount Street, Manchester M2. 'Palestinians and a "Jewish and democratic" state'.
Organised by Palestine Solidarity Campaign: www.palestinecampaign.org.

Band together to beat bedroom tax

Saturday May 18, 8pm: Gig, Sun Inn, Knowles Street, Stockton-on-Tees. Music with Pellethead, Joe Solo and Dinnernanny. £2.
Organised by Stockton People Against the Bedroom Tax and Teesside Solidarity Movement: <http://teessidesolidaritymovement.wordpress.com>.

Axe the bedroom tax

Saturday May 18, 11am: Protest, City Hall, Barkers Pool, Sheffield S1.
Organised by Sheffield Unite the Community: www.facebook.com/UniteCommunitySheffield.
www.peoplesassemblynottingham.org.

Anti-bedroom tax fundraiser

Saturday May 18, 8pm: Gig, Sun Inn, Knowles Street, Stockton-on-Tees. Music with Pellethead, Joe Solo and Dinnernanny.
Organised by Teesside Solidarity Movement: <http://teessidesolidaritymovement.wordpress.com>.

Defend education

Rallies against government plans.
Cardiff: Saturday May 18, 11am, Motorpoint Arena, Mary Ann Street, Cardiff CF10.
Newcastle: Saturday May 18, 11am, Centre for Life, Times Square, Newcastle upon Tyne NE1.
Organised by NUT: www.teachers.org.uk; and NASUWT: www.nasuwt.org.uk.

People's Assembly

Saturday May 18, 10.30am to 5pm: Public event, Friends Meeting House, Clarendon Street, Nottingham.
Organised by People's Assembly Nottingham:

Launch rallies

Newcastle: Monday May 20, 6.30pm, Black Swan, 69 Westgate Road, NE26.

Manchester: Tuesday May 21, 5.30pm, Central Hall, Oldham Street, M1.

Sheffield: Wednesday May 22, 7pm, room 6620, Level 6, Sheffield Hallam University, Howard Street, S1.

Brighton: Thursday May 30, 7pm, Brighthelm Church and Community Centre, North Road, BN1.

Organised by the People's Assembly: www.thepeoplesassembly.org.uk.

North London: Thursday May 30, 7pm, the Twelve Pins, 263 Seven Sister's Road, London N4.

Organised by the People's Assembly: www.thepeoplesassembly.org.uk.

CPGB wills

Remember the CPGB and keep the struggle going. Put the CPGB's name and address, together with the amount you wish to leave, in your will. If you need further help, do not hesitate to get in contact.

LEFT UNITY

Anti-sectarian sectarianism

Left Unity began badly, with existing left groups barred from attending, even as observers. Tina Becker reports on the May 11 national meeting

About 100 people attended the first national gathering of Left Unity on May 11 in London's Ambassador Hotel. The meeting certainly succeeded in its conscious aim to be different from the various other left unity projects that have emerged over the last 15 years or so - the Socialist Alliance, Respect, Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition, etc. No one organisation or group of people dominated proceedings; opposing views were heard; plenty of time was allocated to air arguments and on a number of occasions the conference (or "internal meeting", as Kate Hudson insisted in an exchange with the CPGB) voted against the wishes of the 'interim steering committee' that had convened the gathering.

That is to put a positive spin on things. A very positive one. In reality, in terms of moving the organisation forward (clarifying its politics, for example), the day was a bit of a shambles. Left Unity is totally underorganised and underprepared.

Kate Hudson and Andrew Burgin (important driving forces) would have liked the proceedings to have gone differently. After all, the Stop the War Coalition and Respect - organisations both comrades were prominent in - were far more choreographed. But, ironically, bureaucratic coherence in fronts like these was provided by the likes of the Socialist Workers Party, part of the organised left to which LU is to a great extent a reaction. The politically decrepit Socialist Resistance - the one 'insider' group - is no substitute.

The proposed political platform written by Kate Hudson was circulated three days before; a proposal for the electoral procedure to the national coordination committee was sent out 20 hours before; the chairs seem to have been pre-chosen on the basis that they had no previous experience of handling big meetings (one chair was actually introduced as someone who had "never attended a political meeting before"). No wonder that quite a few times people in the room (the chairs included) did not actually know what exactly they were voting on. It was pretty chaotic, in other words.

This was also reflected in the rather uneven attendance. Local groups were supposed to send two delegates each, but where more people expressed an interest in coming, they were advised by the interim leadership to simply divide their group into smaller parts. For example, Manchester comrades - all sitting together in the same meeting, in the same room - selected five delegates from different parts of the city. Elsewhere, groups had not even met yet. Andrew Burgin admitted that about half of the "90 or 100" local groups exist only in so far as one person had volunteered to be the local contact. So the reality was that pretty much anybody who wanted to come could do so.

Unless, of course, you happened to be a representative of a political organisation. The interim organising committee had decided to bar existing groups from even sending observers - apart from a representative of the Red-Green Alliance from Denmark, who showed up halfway through the meeting. Obviously it would have been a little harsh to send this poor comrade packing after he had made such a long journey, presumably on a well-informed hunch.

Nevertheless, the organised British left was there, of course. Apart from

two CPGB members, I identified about four Workers Power comrades, six from Socialist Resistance, one from the Alliance for Workers' Liberty and two members of the Socialist Party in England and Wales. The 'less organised left' was there too: about half a dozen each from the Anti-Capitalist Initiative and Richard Seymour's International Socialist Network. While the ACI was led by ex-Workers Power member Simon Hardy, no leading member of the ISN was present. Those ISN members who did attend did not seem to have a clear idea of what they were doing there.

There were also a fair number of people I had not seen since the Socialist Alliance days: Will McMahon, Pete McLaren, Dave Church, etc. The rest (probably the majority of attendees) struck me either as having not been in anything before or those who had been burned - some singed, some third degree - by the organised left in one form or another.

Banning the groups?

In fact, the question of what role political organisations should play dominated the conference from the start. In the first and longest session of the day (which was billed "local report-backs") it became clear that most local groups had only just been formed, so there was not a great deal to report. People used the opportunity to talk about the relationship between the LU and the existing left - or, more precisely, how to keep the buggers out. There was a distinct air of anti-sectarian sectarianism about the proceedings, with many arguing for "safeguards" against an SWP or SPEW takeover.

One ex-SWP member suggested that new members should be "vetted" to make sure they are "serious" about LU. Another ex-SWP comrade, Tom Walker, stated that "we can't stop them from joining, but we can stop them from trying to split LU or recruit to their own organisations" (though he did not elaborate on how that could be done). Worse, I have been told that there are local LU branches that have banned SWP members. Though there have been reports that in other parts of the country SWP and SPEW members have been attending.

I would guess that about half of those present were implacably against any involvement of the organised left in any form. The other, more sensible, half, however, at least recognised that "we can't pretend that the rest of the left doesn't exist; we can't just go around them", as it was put. One comrade ironically asked: "So let me get this straight: we're going to be the only non-sectarian group on the left? Don't you think all the groups we criticise think exactly that of themselves, too?" Most of those people seem to agree that groups of like-minded people should be able to get together to form political platforms. I was surprised, actually, by how many people echoed this demand. However, without even a membership structure in place yet, this healthy sentiment could not be enshrined as a founding LU principle. The next national gathering in September will undoubtedly revisit the issue.

A number of comrades argued that 'one member, one vote' would be an effective guard against any one group taking the project over. This is an illusion. The SA and Respect organised on that basis and were dominated by the SWP. And why not, in one sense? SWP comrades were

the majority - and majorities, like minorities, should have rights. OMOV could not prevent an organisation like the SWP dominating LU - unless the new initiative implements a regime of bans and proscriptions from its inception. And down that road lies madness - and Arthur Scargill's Socialist Labour Party.

We argued for an individual membership structure. But we also urged an honest, open and active engagement with the existing left. Surely, the massive task of building an alternative to the capitalist system requires the unity of as much talent, energy, experience and commitment as we can muster - cadre, in other words.

Unfortunately, our proposal to "invite political organisations that are interested in building left unity to send one observer each to the newly set up national coordination committee" was defeated, with only Workers Power, ACI and a few individuals supporting the amendment (the two SPEW members voted against it, while Nick Wrack abstained). The motion got a relatively decent 19 votes.

Workers Power also pushed for political organisations to be allowed to affiliate, though it did not concretise this in a motion and no-one seemed to support the idea anyway. One of the SPEW members bravely called for a federal structure. I spoke to the comrade later and it became clear that he had not been sent there by his organisation, but just happened to be involved in LU locally and thought a federal structure would be "a good idea". Needless to say, his suggestion went down like a lead balloon.

No statement

Kate Hudson's statement was intended to "clarify our politics". Undoubtedly, there is a real need for this. Apart from Ken Loach's short appeal, LU has nothing

approaching a political platform. Comrade Hudson's statement clarified little, unfortunately. Or, as comrade Carmen from Manchester put it, "I like the fact that the statement is so broad. Everybody can interpret it any way they like." Which is actually a *problem*, rather than a strength.

Despite its vacuous nature, the statement sparked controversy even in the non-elected interim committee. Without the time to thrash things out, the committee nonetheless decided to circulate it to members and local groups for discussion. Most

LU signatories did not see it before Wednesday May 8 - three days before conference. So there was no time to discuss it in any detail (or at all). A few groups managed it and 20-odd amendments from a handful of them had been sent in, but these were only distributed on the morning of conference.

Correctly recognising the "democratic deficit" of this process, comrade Nick Wrack moved a procedural motion to the effect that the meeting should not vote on the statement (and the various amendments to it). After a long debate, his motion won a relatively strong 51 for, with 36 against and 12 abstentions. Good stuff. The statement was pretty awful and would have required major surgery. There was neither the time nor the political will at this gathering. Strangely though, Workers Power voted against the procedural motion. Leading member Richard Brenner berated us: "While we're spending hours discussing the process here, the Tories are dismantling the welfare state." (One can only wonder how impatient this 'Bolshevik' comrade would have been with the *months* and *years* the Russian Marxists spent on programmatic discussions while the tsar was being generally rather unpleasant to workers and peasants.)

Apart from having the 'no vote' motion go

against them, comrades Hudson, Burgin and their supporters in Socialist Resistance must have been especially annoyed to spot Ken Loach, no less, raising his hand for the motion. Immediately following the vote, he gave a brief speech, which he opened with the sentence, "It's really great to see democracy in action".

His speech was a little confused, but it stood in contrast to some of what was on offer. We should not be afraid to use leftwing terms, he said (one ex-SWP member had said that we should not use "left language, as people don't understand it. I was a member of the SWP for years and I don't understand it" - that's the SWP for you, comrade, not the language). Comrade Loach argued that we should openly fight against capitalism, for a planned economy and for socialism: "We don't want a social democratic party, we don't just want to pull Miliband a little bit to the left."

I am reliably informed that his speech was a conscious dig at Hudson's soft statement on the one hand and Socialist Resistance on the other - the latter had actually been arguing against LU becoming a socialist organisation. Hudson and Burgin were obviously not happy bunnies: they sat stony-faced through Loach's speech, not laughing when others did and clapping him rather limply when there really was no alternative.

Coordinating committee

Originally, the plan was to have 50 members elected directly to a national coordinating committee at the May 11 gathering. But this proved controversial on the interim committee, so the day before it was announced that local groups should send one delegate each to the new body and another 10 should be elected at the conference. I have already mentioned that our amendment - calling for an additional point 4, allowing for groups to send observers to the committee - was defeated, but there was another controversy around Point 3: "At least 50% of the 10 people on the NCC elected today should be made up of women." Soraya Lawrence, a member of the interim committee, argued against "such bureaucratic measures" and moved to delete the point. In the end, we in the CPGB were among the 20 who voted for deletion.

It would have been much better to seriously discuss how to involve more women in politics. On a practical level, a crèche at conference, for example, would have been a nice touch.

The 10 members directly elected at conference were: Andrew Burgin, Terry Conway, Merry Cross, Felicity Dowling, Guy Harper, Kate Hudson, Chris Hurley, Salman Shaheen, Bianca Todd and Tom Walker.

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Notes

1. www.socialistparty.org.uk/
issue/759/16429/03-04-2013/april-2013-tory-cuts-blitz.



Ken Loach: socialism

Svengalis of Left Unity block unity

Peter Manson examines two contrasting views of the new attempt to revive Labourism

What attitude should revolutionaries take to organisations such as the newly formed Left Unity grouping? Clearly, when over 8,000 people sign a petition in favour of a new leftwing initiative, and the most active set up dozens of local groups across the country, this is something that should be welcomed.

Precisely the opposite view has been taken by Peter Taaffe and the Socialist Party in England and Wales. True, in an article in *The Socialist* last month, comrade Taaffe conceded that “Ken Loach ... has opened up a very welcome discussion on the need for a viable alternative to the Labour Party.” But that is far as he is prepared to go. The main problem with Left Unity is ... it is not the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition! Comrade Taaffe writes: “Learning from [previous failed attempts to form a new left party], the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition ... is the first serious attempt to create the foundations of a new movement expressing the voice of the working class for their own independent party. It is in the best traditions of the labour movement with a federal constitution, and, moreover, unlike other attempts, is firmly based in the trade union movement.”

Well, in that case, clearly everyone should just join Tusc instead of wasting their time in organisations that are not controlled by SPEW. But, returning to reality, why does comrade Taaffe claim that Tusc is more “serious” than, say, the Socialist Alliance? Because it is “firmly based in the trade union movement”? By which I presume he means that the RMT (but no other union) is affiliated to it and that most of its activists are trade unionists (who also happen to be SPEW members). Because it has a “federal constitution”, which, as everybody knows, is “in the best traditions of the labour movement”? What? Do worthwhile working class bodies - parties and unions, for example - usually have a “federal constitution” then? Like the RMT or SPEW itself? That is a new one.

Finally, perhaps Tusc should be regarded as the “first serious attempt” to express “the voice of the working class for their own independent party” because it is garnering such outstanding election results. For instance, in the May 2 county council elections in England, its 119 candidates picked up 8,266 votes all told. That translates into a 2.5% average in the seats where it contested. Just 14 of its candidates managed over five percent, the highest being in Bolsover North, where Peter Neeve received 247 votes (9.4%). At the lower end of the Tusc results table, 17 comrades won less than one percent.

And in between elections, of course, Tusc effectively closes down. SPEW comrades organise local meetings under their own name, not that of Tusc - as do those from the Socialist Workers Party, who only bother with Tusc in a few carefully selected areas in any case. As for Tusc supporters who are not SPEW or SWP members, well, I’m sorry, they just have to wait for the next round of elections. First serious attempt indeed!

Comrade Taaffe concludes: “Therefore, any discussion that is opening up with Ken Loach and his supporters cannot ignore the importance of Tusc.” Yes, Tusc is just so important.

However, the SPEW general secretary does have one thing going for him. He writes: “Some, including many of those gathering around Ken Loach, are political grasshoppers



Svengali: Left unity - good politics, not cynical manipulation

leaping light-mindedly from one project to another. Their ‘projects’ invariably fail.” This does indeed get to the heart of the problem. Such projects either rely on the discipline provided by the likes of the SWP or SPEW just to tick over and, if that is not forthcoming, generally cannot survive for long. What a pity that the SWP and SPEW cynically use the ‘unity initiatives’ which they do support in the same way as they use all their ‘united fronts’: as recruiting bodies for the mother ‘party’.

Having dismissed the “political grasshoppers”, comrade Taaffe concludes: “We do not need at this critical juncture miracle workers searching for an easy route to the solution of the problems of the working class. We need, instead, a mass movement to defeat the cuts - and the trade unions offer the best hope for the vehicle that can do this.” This comment shows just how “serious” Tusc really is: “instead” of trying to set up a new party - Tusc’s avowed aim - the main task is to build a union-led “mass movement to defeat the cuts”. However, showing he can face both ways, Taaffe immediately follows this statement with: “On a political level Tusc also offers the best hope for furthering the process of creating a viable new mass workers’ party.”

SWP dismissal

The above comments appeared in a lengthy article entitled ‘Tory cuts blitz: we must stop them’. And, strangely enough, the SWP’s judgement on LU is also published almost as an aside at the beginning of April - in an article by Alex Callinicos, headed ‘Tories in crisis allow chance of left revival’. As far as I know, this is the only mention of LU in any SWP publication to date. Neither *Socialist Worker* nor *The Socialist* reported on the May 11 conference (of course, neither ‘reporters’ nor observers were permitted to attend, but you might have thought that both SPEW and the SWP would have found a way to inform their readers on the proceedings).

Comrade Callinicos, noting “the enthusiastic response that film director Ken Loach’s call for a new party of the left has received”, states that the austerity onslaught against the welfare state and, in particular, the national health service, has provoked a response both within and outside Labour: “Defending these achievements ... also provides the Labour left with their benchmark. So what we have is, in effect, two different projects for reviving the reformist tradition in Britain. Both have to be taken seriously.”

Well, yes, reformism dominates both the Labour left and the LU, but we have to take both formations seriously nevertheless. However, should we not attempt to intervene in them in order to combat that reformism? It appears not. The most the SWP aspires to is some kind of cooperation: “This makes it all the more important that all those who want to see a left alternative to Labour work together.”

Work together to do what? To help build that left alternative? If so, what kind of left alternative should it be? Comrades will no doubt recall that the SWP closed down the Socialist Alliance in order to build Respect, which, in its hands, espoused reformism “of a special type” - it appealed to and incorporated those who were not even part of the working class tradition.

Or does he mean that we should just “work together” in common campaigns against the cuts and so on? Either way, the SWP is very similar to SPEW in its approach - it views itself as the revolutionary party in embryo and so it is all just a question of manoeuvring to increase its own influence and size. New organisations such as Left Unity are regarded almost entirely from the point of view of their usefulness, or otherwise, to the cause of a greater SWP.

So, while both SPEW and the SWP may seek discussions with Loach and co, do not expect them to participate in a formation that they did not set up and are unlikely to be able to control.

‘Broad left’ fan

One group that takes a diametrically opposite approach to the grudging indifference of SPEW and the SWP is Socialist Resistance. In fact, although the organisers have made clear that the left groups are not invited to participate, SR comrades are very much involved and in the know. As Alan Thornett states, “... we as SR had been involved from the outset”.

As with the SWP and SPEW, SR’s first comments on LU, including the above remark, appeared in a longer, more general article: comrade Thornett’s ‘New opportunities for left realignment’. He demonstrates just how much of a fan SR is of the idea of a ‘broad left’ party, when he writes: “Syriza has demonstrated that a coalition of forces organised democratically within a single party can win mass support and break the hold of the main establishment parties, including social democracy.”

In fact, according to comrade Thornett, “There seems to be a general consensus that a new organisation

should be a broad, pluralist, left-of-Labour, anti-austerity party ...” It is strange that he was able to assess the “general consensus” in an article written a week before the LU meeting was held, let alone before the organisation had even discussed what sort of party is needed.

Previously, comrade Thornett had been pessimistic: “Just a few months ago the prospects for such a party, in England, looked extremely bleak ...” (Of course, we know that SR supports the idea of Scottish socialists organising separately from those in England, but it seems comrade Thornett wants to exclude from LU those in Wales too.) For example, he laments the failure of Respect, which “was ... eventually destroyed when [George] Galloway imposed his own top-down control and turned it into a support group for himself”. Comrade Thornett dates this to 2012, even though SR actually walked out of Respect back in 2010 - precisely over Respect’s decision to start organising in Scotland.

Comrade Thornett is effusive in his praise for Ken Loach’s film *The spirit of ’45*, which is “a big defence of socialist and collectivist ideas, and in particular public ownership and public services”. That just about sums up SR’s attitude and what kind of party it hopes will emerge - one that forlornly attempts to relive old Labour-style Keynesian welfarism.

Writing on LU’s own website, another SR comrade, Dave Kellaway, described as “a member of the Fourth International”, attempts to give this approach a theoretical gloss.

Comrade Kellaway polemicalises against both comrades Callinicos and Taaffe, and in response to Callinicos in particular he is totally ineffective. Allegedly the SWP leader “does not see any distinction between Owen Jones and his ‘reclaiming Labour’ idea and the Loach/LU organised party project, which is implicitly positioned as a clear rejection of Labour ... it is clear that there is difference between the Owen Jones position and Left Unity - there are not two sides of the same Labourist reformism.”

The difference between the two, comrade Kellaway, is merely in the way in which the two sets of reformists envisage an old-Labour party coming into being - which is exactly the point comrade Callinicos was making.

But our Fourth International comrade is not on much firmer ground in his response to Peter Taaffe either. He finds comrade Taaffe’s “political grasshoppers” comment “rather offensive” - not only to the likes of comrades Loach, Kate Hudson, Andrew Burgin and Alan Thornett, but to grasshoppers too! After all, they “fulfil an important role in the ecosystem and provide protein for humans in some cultures”.

Comrade Kellaway points out that “Lenin and the Bolsheviks, so reverentially referenced by Peter, also made lots of moves. The question is always how to relate to the concrete political situation.” I wonder if the “lots of moves” made by the Bolsheviks included flitting as individuals from one ‘broad’, specifically non-revolutionary grouping to another?

He clearly associates himself with those “grasshoppers” when he writes: “At the moment there are thousands of individual activists who are looking for an alternative to Miliband’s Labour. They are excited about a new party ... some have gone through Respect or the Socialist Alliance. Hopefully we will learn from our mistakes.”

Hopefully you will, comrade, but I’m not holding my breath.

Reformist ‘stage’

Let us be clear over two things. First, the “political grasshoppers” criticism is surely levelled primarily at individuals like comrades Hudson and Burgin, who have had numerous political homes. For example, comrade Hudson was a longstanding member of the *Morning Star*’s Communist Party of Britain. She left in 2011 and joined Respect the next year, but she resigned a few months later over Galloway’s remarks defending Julian Assange.

The term “light-mindedly” does indeed spring to mind. Surely it cannot be right to walk out of a political organisation over the clumsy, off-the-cuff remarks of a leading figure. Surely your duty should be to fight within that organisation against what you regard as a mistaken political position. And why did comrade Hudson leave the CPB? Where is her political critique of its failings?

Secondly, there should be no criticism of comrades for joining the SA, Respect, LU, etc *per se*. After all, we in the CPGB have been in all three organisations (not to mention the Socialist Labour Party before that). In general we have *welcomed* the formation of such groups (the exception being Respect, which represented a marked shift to the right on the part of the main groups involved, the SWP and SR’s forerunner, the International Socialist Group). The criticism is directed at comrades’ reasons for doing so. Whereas we have seen all such formations as a site to struggle for *what is necessary* - a single, united, Marxist party - by contrast, almost the entire left (including the unattached “grasshoppers”) view them as a necessary stage.

Comrade Kellaway attempts to tackle this question in his polemic, when he writes: “Left Unity represents an understanding that radicalising forces do not pass immediately from reformism to revolutionary positions in one go. It is obvious that the whole process is uneven. Clearly we do not accept *closed off* stages in the revolutionary process or transition which can lead to the revolution being strangled by cautious, reformist forces who say ‘This far and no further’ ... However an awareness of the *stages* in the development of revolutionary consciousness is a different matter.”

The problem is that formations like LU do not set out to lead comrades “from reformism to revolutionary positions” *at all*. They appeal to disillusioned old Labour supporters as *they are* and as a corollary restrict any “radicalising forces” that join to the reformist milieu. They are *designed from the beginning* as forums that say, “This far and no further”.

But the battle for Left Unity has not really begun. It is far from predetermined that there will be a ‘Left Party’ regarded by its Svengalis as a halfway house between reform and revolution, but one that in reality can never progress to the revolutionary ‘stage’. We in the CPGB will seek cooperation with all those within it who want to fight for a Marxist party in the here and now ●

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Notes

1. *The Socialist* April 3.
2. *Socialist Worker* April 5.
3. www.internationalviewpoint.org/spip.php?article2959.
4. <http://leftunity.org/what-some-of-the-left-groups-are-saying-about-left-unity>.

ISRAEL

Hebrew versus Jewish identity

This is an expanded version of the talk given by Moshé Machover at the March 3 London conference, 'Reclaiming an Alternative Jewish Culture and Identity'

Let me start with a proposition that should by now be a matter of general knowledge: the totality of Jews do not constitute a nation in the modern sense of this term; nor have they been a nation in any contemporary meaningful sense for well over 2,000 years.

The only attribute common to all Jews is Judaism, the Jewish religion, encoded in the Hebrew-cum-Aramaic language of its sacred texts and liturgy. The only way in which a non-Jew - a person whose mother was not Jewish - can become a Jew is by religious conversion; and a Jew who converts to another religion is no longer regarded as a Jew (except by racists, who believe in the false doctrine of race). There is, of course, such a thing as secular Jewish identity: in other words, there are people not practising Judaism or believing in its god, but who regard themselves and are regarded by others as Jews. But outside Israel - I will return to this significant exception later on - secular Jewish identity tends to dissipate after two or three generations: it normally no longer pertains to persons who do not practise Judaism, and none of whose parents and grandparents practised this religion.

Of course, some Jewish communities have, or used to have, common secular cultural or social attributes, such as a communal language of everyday discourse, a literature in this language and a distinctive musical tradition. But these attributes differ as between communities. Ashkenazi Jews spoke Yiddish (a German dialect), Sephardi Jews spoke Ladino (Judeo-Spanish), Iraqi Jews spoke Judeo-Arabic.

The fact that the Jews are not a single nation or 'people' has been popularised by Shlomo Sand's book *The invention of the Jewish people*.¹ Actually, Sand did not claim he was disclosing original or new discoveries; he merely put together what was quite well known, but not so widely recognised. Indeed, anti-Zionists had long ago argued that the Jews do not constitute a nation in the modern sense (current since the French Revolution).² It was simply a matter of dispelling the misconception fostered by Zionist ideology: the myth that Jews all over the world are a single ancient nation, forcibly exiled from its ancient homeland, the Land of Israel, to which it is 'returning', thanks to the Zionist project of 'ingathering of the exiles'.

A Jewish nation that perished

Yet this Zionist myth had a degree of verisimilitude, because it was partly based on fact; a fallacious generalisation of a particular reality. By the second half of the 19th century, the Yiddish-speaking Ashkenazim in the Russian empire and its immediate periphery did constitute a nation or quasi-nation, with its own Yiddish language, vibrant culture, secular literature, music and (by the end of that century) organised working class, led by the Jewish Bund. (The Bundists did not have to invent a new Yiddish culture: they simply invested it with proletarian content.) This quasi-national group did not, of course, encompass the entirety of world Jewry, but did comprise a considerable majority of it.³

The Bund, the foremost Jewish workers' organisation in the Russian empire, was formed in 1897. A year later, when it helped to found the

Russian Social Democratic Labour Party, it demanded, and was initially granted, the right to be an autonomous national section within the new party. In the 1903 second congress of the RSDLP, the majority (Bolshevik) faction, led by Lenin, had that right revoked, and the Bund thereupon split from the RSDLP. (It rejoined the party at the 1906 6th Congress, in which the Bolshevik faction was a minority.) Among Lenin's arguments was the claim that the Jews were not a nation. In support of this claim he quoted "one of the most prominent of Marxist theoreticians", Karl Kautsky, as well as the anti-Zionist radical French Jew, Alfred Naquet.⁴

However, Lenin's polemic on this particular point is somewhat misplaced: Kautsky and Naquet argue, in effect, that the totality of all Jews is not a nation. But the Bund had no need for such an overarching, and indeed false, notion. It was not concerned with world Jewry, but only with the Jewish workers in the Russian empire, as its full name made clear: General Jewish Labour Bund (Federation) of Lithuania, Poland and Russia. Kautsky and Naquet based their denial of Jewish nationhood on the observation that world Jewry lacks a common language and is not territorially localised. But the Jews with whom the Bund was concerned did have their own distinct language, Yiddish. And, while they were not a majority of the population in a single, contiguous territory, they did not differ very much in this respect from some other national groups in the mosaic of eastern Europe, where nationhood tended to be primarily a linguistic-cultural category.

Moreover, Yiddish-speakers did form a high proportion of the population in quite a few towns and cities, mostly clustered in the western parts of the Russian empire. This was documented by the Russian imperial census of 1897. Note that in the census summary tables 'nationality' was based on the declared mother language of respondents. The census recorded a little over five million Yiddish speakers, constituting some four percent of the total population. The census also classified respondents by religion; and, according to this classification, the Jews were 4.15% of the total, presumably because some Jews (mostly outside the Pale of Settlement) were linguistically assimilated.⁵

Let us look at the percentage of Jews in the population of some selected cities.⁶

City	%
Łódź	31
Warsaw	34
Kovno (Kaunas)	36
Odessa	37
Wilno (Vilnius)	41
Kishinev (Chişinău)	43
Mogilev	52
Vitebsk	52
Minsk	52
Pinsk	74

Clearly, it was quite possible for Jews living in those areas to interact mainly with members of their own community, in their own language. So it is hardly surprising that many of them regarded themselves, and were widely regarded by others, as a national group. (Indeed, Lenin's contrary view notwithstanding, Jews in the USSR were classed as a national group, and were officially registered as such in the 'nationality' rubric of the ID document that each Soviet citizen had to carry.)

Of course, this quasi-nation no longer exists: most of it perished in the Nazi genocide, and the remainder largely dispersed. But a considerable majority of present-day Jews around the world are its relics and descendants, and still carry in their collective memory a lingering sense of a national identity, which, while no longer based on actual reality, did have a real basis in the not too distant past.

Western Jews' opposing view

While many Jews living in, or recently migrated from, eastern Europe around 1900 tended to regard Jewishness as a national category, members of the long-established Jewish communities in western Europe and the US tended to view matters quite differently, due to their very different experience. They shared their non-Jewish compatriots' language of everyday discourse and secular culture. And, unlike their east European coreligionists, in most western countries they had won legal equality. In the US Jews had equal rights since 1789, and the French Revolution emancipated the Jews in 1791. This was extended to other west European countries during the 19th century (Napoleon freed the Jews in the countries he conquered). In the UK, the process was - as you would expect - gradual, and Jews achieved full legal equality relatively late, under the 1858 Oath Bill.⁷

The deal in 1791 revolutionary France was that Jews would be equal citizens of France, as members of the French nation. They would, of course, be perfectly free to practise their distinct religion. This kind of deal was emulated elsewhere - and it was a tremendous achievement, which its beneficiaries were loath to lose. To most of them the idea, propagated by anti-Semites and Zionists, of a separate, worldwide Jewish nation was anathema.

I referred earlier to Lenin's polemic, in which he invokes Alfred Naquet against the Bund. Here is the relevant quote from Lenin's article.

A French Jew, the radical Alfred Naquet, says practically the same thing [as Kautsky - MM], word for word, in his controversy with the anti-Semites and the Zionists.⁸

"If it pleased Bernard Lazare," he writes of the well-known Zionist, "to consider himself a citizen of a separate nation, that is his affair; but I declare that, although I was born a Jew ... I do not recognise Jewish nationality ... I belong to no other nation but the French ... Are the Jews a nation?"

Although they were one in the remote past, my reply is a categorical negative.

"The concept nation implies certain conditions which do not exist in this case. A nation must have a territory on which to develop, and, in our time at least, until a world confederation has extended this basis, a nation must have a common language. And the Jews no longer have either a territory or a common language ... Like myself, Bernard Lazare probably did not know a word of Hebrew, and would have found it no easy matter, if Zionism had achieved its purpose, to make himself understood to his co-racials [congénères] from other parts of the world.

"German and French Jews are quite unlike Polish and Russian Jews. The characteristic features of the Jews include nothing that bears the imprint [empreinte] of nationality. If it were permissible to recognise the Jews as a nation, as Drumont does, it would be an artificial nation. The modern Jew is a product of the unnatural selection to which his forebears were subjected for nearly 18 centuries."

This argumentation was echoed a few years later by leading members of the established Jewish community in Britain against the Zionist leader, Chaim Weizmann. Weizmann - who was to be the first president of Israel - was born in 1874 near Pinsk (a city where Jews were nearly three quarters of the total population, as we have seen). From 1904 he was senior lecturer in chemistry at the university of Manchester, where he invented an industrial process for producing acetone - a crucial input for manufacturing the explosive, cordite, which played an important role in World War I. During that war, he was active lobbying the British government for a charter whereby Zionist colonisation of Palestine would proceed under British protection. (This charter was eventually granted on November 2 1917. It is known as the Balfour Declaration and was included verbatim in the text of the Palestine mandate granted to Britain in June 1922 by the League of Nations.)

When Lucien Wolf, distinguished journalist and leading member of the Conjoint Foreign Committee of British Jews, was confronted with Weizmann's project, he wrote a worried letter to James de Rothschild, dated August 31 1916:

Dear Mr James de Rothschild

At the

close of our conference with Dr Weizmann on the 17th inst, you asked me to write you a letter defining my view ...

I have thought over very carefully the various statements made to me by Dr Weizmann, and, with the best will in the world, I am afraid I must say that there are vital and irreconcilable differences of principles and method between us.

The question of principle is raised by Dr Weizmann's assertion of a Jewish nationality. The assertion has to be read in the light of the authoritative essay on 'Zionism and the Jewish future' recently published by Mr Sacher, more especially those written by Dr Weizmann himself and by Dr Gaster. I understand from these essays that the Zionists do not merely propose to form and establish a Jewish nationality in Palestine, but that they claim all the Jews as forming at the present moment a separate and dispossessed nationality, for which it is necessary to find an organic political centre, because they are and must always be aliens in the lands in which they now dwell (Weizmann, p6), and, more especially, because it is "an absolute self-delusion" to believe that any Jew can be at once "English by nationality and Jewish by faith" (Gaster, pp92-93).

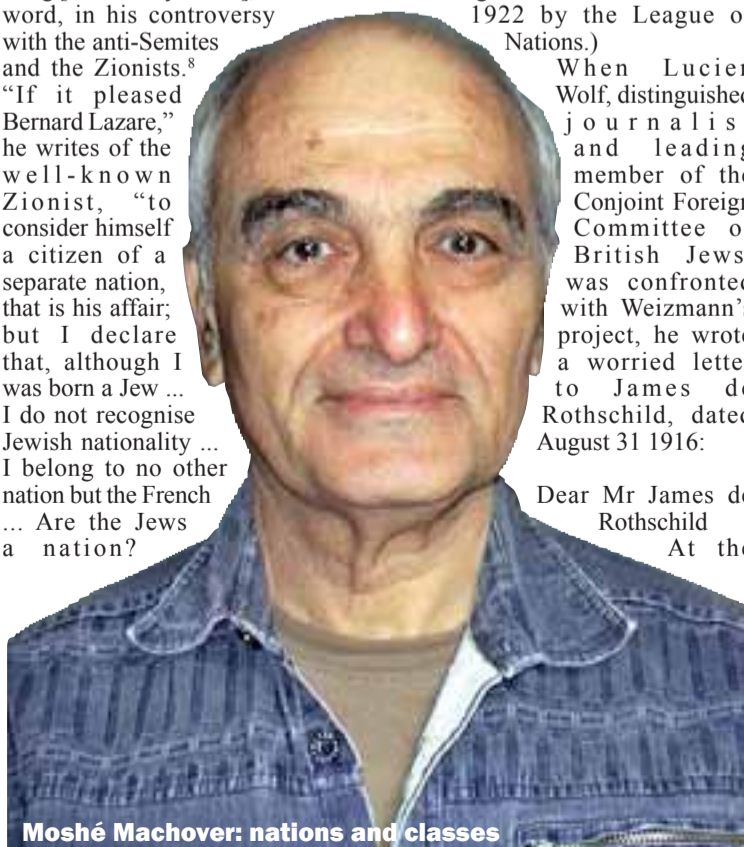
I have spent most of my life in combating these very doctrines, when presented to me in the form of anti-Semitism, and I can only regard them as the more dangerous when they come to me in the guise of Zionism. They constitute a capitulation to our enemies, which has absolutely no justification in history, ethnology or the facts of everyday life, and if they were admitted by the Jewish people as a whole, the result would only be that the terrible situation of our coreligionists in Russia and Romania would become the common lot of Jewry throughout the world.⁹

And on May 24 1917, as negotiations that were to lead to the Balfour Declaration were at an advanced stage, Alexander and Claude Montefiori, presidents respectively of the Board of Deputies of British Jews and of the Anglo-Jewish Association, wrote a letter to *The Times* in the name of the Conjoint Committee of these two bodies, protesting against the fallacies and dangers of political Zionism. After declaring their adherence to Lucien Wolf's position, the writers went on to say that "establishment of a Jewish nationality in Palestine, founded on the theory of Jewish homelessness, must have the effect throughout the world of stamping the Jews as strangers in their native lands and of undermining their hard-won positions as citizens and nationals of those lands".

They point out that the theories of political Zionism undermined the religious basis of Jewry to which the only alternative would be "a secular Jewish nationality, recruited on some loose and obscure principle of race and of ethnographic peculiarity".

They went on:

But this would not be Jewish in any spiritual sense, and its establishment in Palestine would be a denial of all the ideals and hopes by which the survival of Jewish life in that country commends itself to the



Moshé Machover: nations and classes

Jewish conscience and Jewish sympathy. On these grounds the Conjoint Committee of the Board of Deputies and the Anglo-Jewish Association deprecates earnestly the national proposals of the Zionists.

The second part in the Zionist programme which has aroused the misgivings of the Conjoint Committee is the proposal to invest the Jewish settlers [in Palestine] with certain special rights in excess of those enjoyed by the rest of the population ...

In all the countries in which Jews live the principle of equal rights for all religious denominations is vital to them. Were they to set an example in Palestine of disregarding this principle, they would convict themselves of having appealed to it for purely selfish motives. In the countries in which they are still struggling for equal rights they would find themselves hopelessly compromised ... The proposal is the more inadmissible because the Jews are and probably long will remain a minority of the population of Palestine, and might involve them in the bitterest feuds with their neighbours of other races and religions, which would severely retard their progress and find deplorable echoes thought the orient.¹⁰

A new Hebrew nation

As the Zionist colonisation of Palestine proceeded - beginning with the first *aliyah* (Jewish immigration) of 1882-1903 and the second *aliyah* of 1904-14; and then, following World War I, gathering momentum under British protection - a new Hebrew settler nation was forming in that country.

There is nothing exceptional about this. As a general rule, colonisation where the settlers' economy did not depend on the labour-power of the indigenous people led to the formation of a new settler nation; think, for example, of North America or Australia. The only exceptional feature of the Hebrew settler nation is that Zionist ideology denies its distinct nationhood. As we have seen, according to this ideology the settlers are part of a pre-existing Jewish nation, encompassing all Jews everywhere. For this reason the self-awareness of this nation is schizophrenic. At the informal everyday level, persons who are not Jews according to the rabbinical definition, but are socially and culturally integrated in Hebrew society, are regarded - at least by secular Hebrews - as belonging to this new nation; but according to the dominant ideology they cannot be accepted as such.¹¹ To borrow Marx's distinction regarding the different senses of the term 'class', the Hebrew nation is a nation *an sich* (in itself) but not quite *für sich* (for itself).

Ironically, bourgeois and petty bourgeois nationalist Palestinian ideology mirrors its Zionist counterpart in denying the existence of a new Hebrew nation. It finds it difficult to come to terms with the existence of this nation and prefers to conceptualise it as a confessional Jewish community, similar in kind to (albeit larger than) Jewish minorities that existed for centuries in the Arab world, which were indeed essentially confessional communities. This conception is encoded in the formula, "secular, democratic Palestine, in which Christians, Jews and Muslims will live in equality and without discrimination", proposed for resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.¹²

However, readiness to step outside these ideologies will lead anyone familiar with the realities on the ground to conclude that a new Hebrew nation has indeed come into being. The first to do so were the Young Hebrews (better known as 'Canaanites', as they were pejoratively labelled by Zionists, who rightly regarded their views as

heretical). This was a group of artists and writers that formed in 1939 a Committee for Consolidation of the Hebrew Youth. Although its rightwing Hebrew nationalism found little political acceptance, this group had a major impact on modern Hebrew literature and art.¹³

The Young Hebrews were by no means the first to designate the settler community in Palestine as 'Hebrew'. This term was in fact commonly used by the Zionists themselves, who, while refusing to accept that this community was a distinct new *nation*, were quite willing to recognise its distinctiveness and newness - albeit as part of the alleged worldwide Jewish nation. Let me give a few examples of this common usage.

It is widely known that the pre-1948 settler community in Palestine was referred to as the 'Yishuv'. But as a matter of fact the full term used at the time was the 'Hebrew Yishuv' (or, less commonly, the 'new Yishuv') - as distinct from the 'old Yishuv', the pre-Zionist Jewish community in the Holy Land. The first Zionist feminist organisation in Palestine, founded in 1919, called itself the Union of Hebrew Women for Equal Rights in Eretz Yisrael.¹⁴ The notorious Zionist campaign for excluding Arab workers from employment in the settler economy was conducted under the slogan "Hebrew Labour!" And I remember witnessing, as a young boy growing up in Tel-Aviv during the rift between the Zionist movement and the British government, mass Zionist demonstrations in which the main slogans displayed and chanted were "*Aliah hofshit!*" (free Jewish immigration) and "*Medinah Ivrit!*" (Hebrew state!).

Of special significance is the usage in a quintessentially Zionist text, Israel's Declaration of Independence, promulgated on May 14 1948. In its two references to the settler community, the Hebrew text of this document uses the term, "Hebrew Yishuv":

In World War II, the *Hebrew Yishuv* in this country contributed its full share to the struggle of the freedom- and peace-loving nations against the forces of Nazi wickedness and, by the blood of its soldiers and its war effort, gained the right to be reckoned among the peoples who founded the United Nations ...

Accordingly we, members of the People's Council, representatives of the *Hebrew Yishuv* and of the Zionist movement, ... hereby declare the establishment of a Jewish state in Eretz-Yisrael, to be known as the State of Israel.

Even more significantly, in the official English translation, provided by Israel's ministry of foreign affairs, the term "Hebrew Yishuv", which I italicised in this quotation, is falsely rendered as "the Jewish community".¹⁵

'Nation-state of the Jewish people'

This fudge - or, let me call a spade a spade: falsification - in the translation of a key document is not accidental. Since 1948, Zionists have been increasingly reluctant to use the term 'Hebrew' in referring to the so-called 'Israeli Jews' and have preferred the latter term. This terminological backpedalling has a definite ideological, political and propagandist purpose.

It is well known that Israel defines itself officially as a "Jewish and democratic state": this is enshrined in constitutional legislation adopted by the kneset.¹⁶ But most people are not fully aware of the import of this formula. It is widely recognised by critics of Israel that this official definition privileges its Jewish citizens and relegates its Palestinian Arab citizens - approximately one fifth of its population - to an inferior status. This is true, but

by no means the whole truth. What the formula is intended to mean is that Israel is a state of the entire Jewish 'nation': not just of its own Jewish citizens, but of all Jews everywhere.

To prevent any ambiguity, it is now proposed to enact a basic law declaring Israel as "the nation-state of the Jewish people".¹⁷ Moreover, senior Israeli politicians have already made it abundantly clear that any accord between Israel and the Palestinians must be based on acceptance of this formula. Thus, Ron Plessor, Israel's envoy to the UN, asserted on April 26 2013 that "peace must be built on a clear recognition that Israel is the nation-state of the Jewish people".¹⁸

So Israel *officially* presumes to be the state not only of Binyamin Netanyahu but, willy-nilly, also 'of' Ed Miliband and Michael Howard, Noam Chomsky and Norman Finkelstein, as well as Alan Dershowitz.

Clearly, to promote this breathtaking pretension it is necessary to repress Hebrew identity, suppress any reference to it, and blur the distinction between it and Jewishness at large.

This political and ideological strategy is by no means new. In the May 1967 issue of *Matzpen* - the last one to appear before the June war - I published an article entitled 'New premises for a false conclusion', whose English translation is included in my book.¹⁹ This was a polemic against the leading Zionist historian and ideologue, Yigal Elam, who proposed exactly this strategy. Begging the reader's indulgence, let me quote from my 46-year-old article.

The *kernel* of Zionism [according to Elam] is "the linkage of the State of Israel to the Jewish people ... It is only this linkage that gives the State of Israel a sense and a *raison d'être*; it is only from this linkage that it developed, and only with this linkage can it exist and sustain itself in the world's consciousness." Israel is a Zionist state so long as it is not a political instrument of its inhabitants, but of all the world's Jews; and the world's Jews must be harnessed for pro-Israel activity ...

He therefore proposes that Israel's Zionist character be given an official, constitutional and institutional expression:

"The State of Israel will be accepted as the *political project* of the Jewish people, in the *domain of responsibility* of the Jewish people *everywhere*. This means that responsibility for the State of Israel and for whatever happens in it will not be confined to the citizens living within its borders. The Israelis will have to assert this issue in their constitution and give it immediate institutional expression (original emphasis).

In order to secure the "permanent linkage between the Jewish people and the State of Israel" Elam proposes the following two institutions: (a) a written constitution that will proclaim the linkage between the State of Israel and the Jewish people; (b) a senate, in which the Jews of the diaspora will sit, and which will act alongside the kneset and will be empowered to prevent or delay legislation that is contrary to the constitution of the State of Israel or to Jewish public opinion around the world.

To the objection that it is unacceptable for the destiny of a country to be decided by those living abroad, Elam has a ready response: this is nothing new; this is precisely what Zionism has always practised. Indeed, the colonisation of Palestine was carried out without consulting its inhabitants, so the very existence of the Zionist state is based from the start on the premise that the destiny of Palestine ought to be determined not

by its inhabitants, but by the entire Jewish people.²⁰

The background to this proposed strategy was a crisis of Zionism in the period just before the 1967 June war: Jewish immigration had dwindled to a trickle, and the Zionist leadership was worried that in the long run Israel's small size would turn the balance of power between it and the Arab world to its disadvantage.

Following the 1967 war, Israel greatly expanded its territorial domain, and has gained a large inflow of Jewish immigrants from the former Soviet Union and Ethiopia. But it is now ruling over a Palestinian Arab population of roughly the same size as its Hebrew citizenry; and the sources of potential new Jewish immigration seem to be virtually exhausted. So the long-term anxiety about an adverse change in the balance of power is still haunting Zionist strategists. *Plus ça change* ...

Politics of the two identities

In some progressive circles in the Jewish diaspora there are attempts to promote an alternative Jewish identity - secular and non-Zionist, in some cases pointedly anti-Zionist. I assume that this is motivated partly by nostalgia for the murderously extinguished progressive and proletarian tradition of east European Jewry, and partly by outrage at Israel's pretension to speak and act for all Jews and thus implicate them in its misdeeds.

It is not my business to tell those who pursue such an alternative identity how to define themselves. It is entirely up to them. Even nostalgia is a legitimate sentiment (although, alas, it is no longer what it used to be ...). And a progressive Jewish identity deployed against Zionist propaganda certainly plays a positive role.

But I believe that diasporic Jewish secular identity does not have a long-term future, because it lacks an objective basis. The condition of Jews in virtually all parts of the diaspora are not at all like those in eastern Europe around 1900, but more like - in fact, considerably more advanced than - those reflected in the quotes from Naquet, Wolf and the Montefioris. Jews enjoy equal rights, are well integrated in their respective homelands, speak the languages of their compatriots and have no separate culture. There are, of course, famous Jewish authors, writing 'Jewish' novels; but these are part of the general culture of their linguistic communities, just like the English novels of immigrant writers from the Indian subcontinent. Moreover, as I noted before, secular Jewish identity in the diaspora tends to dissipate within a very few generations.

Turning now to Hebrew national identity, it should be clear from my earlier discussion that I think it is very real and - at least potentially - a positive counter to Zionism. The Hebrew nation exists, and those who deny this fact are misguided by ideology. There are also some who claim that this nation is an oppressor not just due to present circumstances, which are mutable, but inherently and inexorably. I find this view quite mistaken. It is no truer of the Hebrew nation than of its American or Australian counterparts.

I think it is vital to recognise this fact, because no eventual benign democratic resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict can be possible unless it is acceptable to a considerable majority - primarily the working class - of *both* national groups; and a precondition for this is recognition of their national existence, and right to exist on equal terms.

What a nation finds acceptable depends, of course, to a large extent on real objective circumstances. Under present conditions no benign

resolution of the conflict is possible, because the balance of power is so overwhelmingly in Israel's favour that what a large majority of Hebrews find acceptable falls far short of what can be acceptable to the Palestinian masses. Yet, even given Israel's massive power, and despite the brutality of its attempts to impose an unjust outcome on the Palestinian Arabs and the Arab nation of which they are a component part, it is unable to achieve this. The strong do what they can, yet the weak can still resist so long as they are alive. Only a total massacre can eliminate their resistance.

And even if the balance of power were to be totally reversed - a very big 'if' - the Hebrew masses would resist to the death any attempt to deny their nationhood or subjugate them as a nation. This is not an outcome that socialists ought to advocate.

I have outlined elsewhere a socialist resolution of the conflict, so I need not expand on it here.²¹ Suffice it to say that it looks beyond the narrow box of Palestine to a regional revolution that will overthrow Zionism as well as the oppressive Arab regimes and establish a socialist Arab east, within which both Palestinian Arab and Hebrew national groups can be accommodated by democratic consent and on equal terms ●

Notes

- Translated by Yael Lotan, London 2009.
- Matzpen's long-held view on this is reiterated in my 2006 public lecture *Israelis and Palestinians: conflict and resolution*, included as chapter 33 in my book by the same title (Chicago 2012). See also the review of Sand's book in chapter 32.
- It is estimated that before World War II over 90% of all Jews were Ashkenazim (see S DellaPergola, 'Demography' in *Encyclopaedia Judaica* Philadelphia 2006, table 2. Also <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ashkenazim>). At the end of the 19th century a large majority of Ashkenazim were in the Russian empire and its periphery, although from about 1888 there was mass migration of Jews from that part of the world to the US and elsewhere.
- See VI Lenin, 'The position of the Bund in the party' (October 1903): www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1903/oct/22a.htm.
- For a general survey of this census see http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Russian_Empire_Census.
- These data are taken from the Wikipedia entries for the respective cities.
- See http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jewish_emancipation; and http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Emanicipation_of_the_Jews_in_the_United_Kingdom.
- Lenin is quoting from Alfred Naquet's article, 'Drumont and Bernard Lazare', published on September 24 1903 in the Paris *La Petite République*. Édouard Drumont was founder of the Anti-Semitic League of France.
- Photocopy of typewritten original in B Destani (ed) *The Zionist movement and the foundation of Israel* 1839-1972, Cambridge 2004, Vol 1, p727.
- See www.godlikeproductions.com/forum1/message55570/pg1.
- Occasionally this poses difficult conundrums for the Israeli legal system. An instance of this was the notorious case of major Binyamin Shalit, whose children were not Jewish according to rabbinical law. See www.haaretz.com/fateful-years-1970-welcoming-their-children-s-children-1.34889.
- See my critique of this conception in chapters 17 and 34 of my book *Israelis and Palestinians (op cit)*. Chapter 34 is online at www.cpgb.org.uk/home/weekly-worker/757/breaking-the-chains-of-zionist-oppression; and www.israeli-occupation.org/2009-02-19/moshe-machover-resolution-of-the-israeli-palestinian-conflict-a-socialist-viewpoint.
- See <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Canaanism>.
- See <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yishuv>.
- See www.mfa.gov.il/mfa/foreignpolicy/peace/guide/pages/declaration%20of%20establishment%20of%20state%20of%20israel.aspx.
- Passed in 1985 as amendment 9, clause 7a to the *Basic law: the Knesset* 1958. Israel has no written constitution, but 'basic laws' are supposed to be elements of a future constitution and have constitutional force.
- See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Basic_Law_proposal:_Israel_as_the_Nation-State_of_the_Jewish_People; www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/middleeast/israel/9935954/Israel-to-define-itself-as-national-state-of-Jewish-people-despite-Arab-population.html.
- See www.ejpress.org/article/66009.
- Israelis and Palestinians (op cit)*, chapter 18.
- Elam's words quoted and paraphrased above are from his article, 'New premises for the same Zionism' *Or* No2, winter 1967. *Or*, of which Elam was an editor, was an official journal of the Labour Alignment.
- 'Resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict: a socialist viewpoint': chapter 34 of my book *Israelis and Palestinians (op cit)*. Online at www.cpgb.org.uk/home/weekly-worker/757/breaking-the-chains-of-zionist-oppression; and www.israeli-occupation.org/2009-02-19/moshe-machover-resolution-of-the-israeli-palestinian-conflict-a-socialist-viewpoint.

CLIMATE

Entering the danger zone

Capitalism's growth for growth's sake is putting humanity at grave risk, argues Eddie Ford

Concentrations of carbon dioxide, the most important of the human-made 'greenhouse gases' contributing to global warming, appear to be reaching catastrophic levels. Published last week, the latest findings from Hawaii's Mauna Loa observatory strongly indicate that the average daily level of CO₂ in the air has risen to above 400 parts per million, its highest level since the Pliocene period some 2.6 to 5.8 million years ago. A staggering thought.

The research data from Mauna Loa goes back 800,000 years to the age of the oldest fossilised air bubbles extracted from Dome C, an ice-bound summit in the high Antarctic. During this pre-industrial period, CO₂ concentrations fluctuated between around 180ppm during the ice ages and 280ppm during interglacial warm periods. In other words, we have a massively accelerated pace of change in terms of natural history - there has never been anything like it (as far as we know). And the problem is literally getting worse by the day. Since the measurements started in the late 1950s, the rate of increase has picked up from about 0.7ppm per year to 2.1ppm per year during the last decade. Effectively meaning that CO₂ is now rising *100 times faster* than the increase that occurred when the last ice age ended - a situation that is clearly unsustainable and threatens to totally wreck the planet's ecological system, which is already severely damaged by capitalist exploitation and plunder.

Furthermore, the *Nature Climate Change* journal on March 12 published an extensive study outlining how more than half of common plant species and a third of animal species are likely to see their living space halved within seven decades on current CO₂ emission trends.¹ The species extinction rate is now the highest in 65 million years, with the prospect of cascading extinctions, as the last remnants of vital ecosystems are removed - bird species are dying out at 100 times more than the 'benchmark' or 'natural' rate. As for the output of greenhouse gases, the study warned, they are putting Earth on track for a 4°C temperature hike by 2100 - chiming with figures produced by the United Nations-established Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, which has projected increases in average global temperature of up to 5.8°C for the same period. The implications are calamitous. For example, experiments conducted at the International Rice Institute have led scientists to conclude that with each 1°C increase in temperature, rice, wheat and corn yields could drop 10%.

Drowned

You could argue, if so inclined, that the newest statistics concerning CO₂ concentrations are hardly surprising, given the sheer amount of coal being furiously burnt around the world right at this very moment. The biggest emitters, naturally, are the United States, China and India - all competing in the 'dog eats dog' global race. However, we have now entered a new danger zone - our natural environment is being radically altered.

Just think about it. The 400ppm figure is one that belongs to a *different era* in every sense of the term. As revealed by Mauna Loa and others, the last time we saw comparable levels of CO₂ in the atmosphere was about 4.5 million years ago, when the world was warmer on average by 3-4°C than it is today and 8°C warmer at the poles. A time when the tundra in Siberia and



Pollution and production for the sake of production

Canada was covered in lush forests, savannah and lakes spread across the Sahara, and the Arctic was ice-free - and where the sea level was *20 to 40 metres* higher than today, far above most of the world's major cities.

Alarm bells should be ringing everywhere. In a way, we have created - or recreated - a prehistoric climate under modern industrial conditions: what a perverse achievement. Unless drastic action is taken in the very near future, preferably immediately, cities like London, New York and Tokyo are in danger of being drowned like something from a CGI-heavy science fiction movie. Enjoyable as fantasy, or moral fable, but not so as reality. If the *advanced* countries cannot prevent such a disaster, and there is no reason to think that they can, then what will happen to the poorer countries? An apocalyptic scenario. Bangladeshi peasants, for example, cannot move their farms a mile or so up the road - it is someone else's land.

Humanity has never faced before such an environmental problem - to call it a monumental challenge almost sounds anodyne. Some effects of rapid climate change have already been witnessed, with extreme heat-waves and flooding now more likely. Recent wet and cold summer weather in Europe has been linked to changes in the high-level jet-stream winds, in turn linked to the rapidly melting sea ice in the Arctic - which shrank to a new low in September. The evidence is surely conclusive that the strong growth of global CO₂ emissions from the burning of coal, oil and natural gas is driving the acceleration - to believe anything else is wilful ignorance at best.

In the blunt opinion of Ralph Keeling from the Scripps Institution, there is "no stopping" CO₂ from reaching 400ppm - it is a "done deal". But despite that he emphasises that what happens from here on is potentially "under our control" - something communists agree with wholeheartedly.

Attacks

Despite the evident dangers of runaway global warming, sections of the rightwing media are still attacking climate science - regarding it as some sort of green-Marxist conspiracy to undermine 'civilisation' (ie, capitalism) and send us hurtling back to the stone age. One of the worst offenders,

or buffoons, is the 'anti-wind farm activist' - how sad is that? - James Delingpole, who regularly blogs for *The Daily Telegraph* and other wretched publications. Displaying his reasonable and moderate nature in a *Telegraph* blog post, dated January 25 2012, Delingpole objected to Friends of the Earth's charitable status on the grounds that it is "quite clearly a viciously misanthropic, anti-capitalist political organisation funded by deep-green eco-loons who, given half the chance, would have us all living in Maoist peasant collectives while they busily bombed our economy back to the dark ages". Bettering himself still in a May 2012 article for *The Australian* ("Wind farm scam a huge cover-up"), he described climate science as a "junk-science boondoggle"² and suggested that the advocates of wind farms were like paedophiles.³

Not to be outdone, naturally, is Peter Ferrara - a former White House staff member under Ronald Reagan and prominent analyst for the free-market think-tank, the Heartland Institute. The latter ran a notorious billboard campaign last year claiming that if you believed in global warming then you were in the same camp as the "neo-Luddite", Ted Kaczynski (aka the Unabomber⁴). Rising to the occasion again, Ferrara used a recent column in the online edition of *Forbes* magazine to express the view that climate science is akin to "Lysenkoism"⁵ - an utterly crazy inversion of the truth. If anything, Lysenko's quack pseudo-science - rejecting Mendelian genetics in favour of a lightly warmed-over Lamarckism - had a lot in common with the irrational anti-climate science sceptics.

But people like Delingpole and Ferrara want to construct an alternative universe where there is no such thing as human-created climate change and where the captains of industry - the masters of the universe - rule unchallenged for eternity.

Slightly more down to earth, though no less obnoxious for that, there is the Global Warming Policy Foundation in the UK. Established by Lord Nigel Lawson, the Conservative ex-chancellor, the foundation was officially launched with a November 2009 article in *The Times* accusing climate scientists of "manipulating" records of global temperature and "refusing external" scrutiny of their

raw data. Complete garbage, of course, just like the call for an "open and reasoned debate" about domestic and international climate change policies. Total hypocrisy, considering that the identity of the donors to the foundation is shrouded in secrecy - we only know that it received over £1 million from these mysterious benefactors. When interviewed by BBC Radio 4 last October, Lord Lawson stated that he relied on friends who "tend to be richer than the average person" and "much more intelligent than the average person". Now that really sounds like a man dedicated to democratic openness and the ruthless pursuit of disinterested science.

Capitalism, in reality, is a system uniquely designed *not* to cope with the ecological crisis that is so obviously gripping the planet. Given its very nature, predicated on production for production's sake - not on the basis of satisfying rational human *need* - it is constantly throwing more fuel on the fire. Contrary to a relatively widespread view, capitalism is not the result of countless individual actions taken

by 'bad' or 'greedy' people. Instead it is a form of uncontrolled human relation based on the self-expansion of exchange-value, and this inner dynamic imposes itself on its *personifications* - ie, the capitalists, who ultimately are slaves to capital just as we in the working class are.

Yes, obviously, other past social-economic systems damaged various aspects of the environment - deforestation under the Romans and so on. But capitalism does it on a vaster and more terrifying scale. It is a destructive and wasteful mode of production, which seeks only to make profit - anywhere, anyhow and by any means necessary. Left to itself, capitalism will 'industrialise' to the point of self-destruction, making the air unbreathable and the rivers dead with toxic sludge. Conversely, it will effectively leave underdeveloped whole areas of the globe, where it calculates no profit can reasonably be made.

It should be pointed out that Marxism is ecological to its very core. Karl Marx fought to overcome the "metabolic rift" between humanity and nature, between town and country, which itself was a reflection - and product - of capitalist class rule over the workers, of dead labour over living labour. Any Marxist who is not an environmentalist - not fighting for a genuinely sustainable planet - is clearly not a Marxist.

In that spirit, we communists criticise those on the left who peddle the notion that there is a 'left' Keynesian solution for present society - 'green' jobs, 'green' growth, etc. No, it is still capitalism based on growth for the sake of growth. Still the absolute primacy of the profit motive. In short, a reformed capitalism cannot save the planet - so capitalism must go ●

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Notes

1. www.nature.com/nclimate/journal/voap/ncurrent/full/nclimate1887.html.
2. A term implying that a project is a useless waste of both time and money, but is continuing due to extraneous policy and political motivations.
3. Unsurprisingly, the Australian Press Council received a number of complaints about the article.
4. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ted_Kaczynski.
5. www.forbes.com/sites/peterferrara/2013/04/28/the-disgraceful-episode-of-lysenkoism-brings-us-global-warming-theory.

Fighting fund

Wishful thinking?

"Please find enclosed a cheque for £45 towards the running costs of the *Weekly Worker*," writes comrade JH. "I was particularly impressed with the articles on Winston Churchill, Alexandra Kollontai and Nick Wrack's contribution regarding overcoming the sects." He ends by exhorting us to "Keep up the good work. It will be no easy task!"

Thanks for your encouraging words, comrade - and for matching them with a sizable donation. May's fighting fund was also helped by two other cheques - from KT (£30) and WT (£20). Then there were two PayPal donations from NW (£20) and JL (£10). And finally six standing orders totalling £112 from regular donors JM, AM, DW, SP, JD and MKS.

In all we received £237 this week, taking our total to £703. But

half the month is now gone and we need £1,500 - in other words, we are not yet halfway there. And I am still determined to make up for the £36 we still need to recoup following the shortfall in March. Time to put our collective foot down, I think!

How about a few more of you web readers following the lead of NW and JL? There were just under 10,000 of you last week - 9,980, to be precise. Imagine how much more relaxed I'd be if just one percent of them gave us £10 each! Wishful thinking? Maybe, but you can help to ease my worries at least partially by getting out your credit or debit card ●

Robbie Rix

Fill in a standing order form (back page), donate via our website, or send cheques, payable to *Weekly Worker*

OBITUARY

Corruption, murder and the thirst for power

Toby Abse reviews the life of the Italian prime minister with close Mafia connections: Giulio Andreotti, January 14 1919 - May 6 2013

This month has finally seen the death at the age of 94 of Giulio Andreotti, probably the most important figure in the entire history of Italian Christian Democracy (Democrazia Cristiana - DC), as he played a much greater role in shaping the party's character during the cold war era than his original patron, the party's founder Alcide De Gasperi (1881-1954). Some have tried to portray Andreotti as a major statesman or at worst a "controversial politician".¹ It needs to be pointed out that in actual fact he was linked to the Mafia from the late 1950s until the late 1980s and the instigator of a number of political murders.

Andreotti's longevity - both literal and political (he was a deputy in the lower house of parliament from 1946 until 1991 and a life senator from 1991 until 2013) demonstrates the truth of his most famous aphorism: "Power wears out those who don't have it." The man judged unfit for military service in 1940 outlived the vast majority of his healthier and more athletic male contemporaries.

By far the best description of him was given by Aldo Moro - another leading Christian Democrat and former premier - during his imprisonment by the Red Brigades in 1978: "a cold, inscrutable manipulator, without doubts, without hesitations, without a moment of human pity. This is Andreotti, whose orders all the others have obviously followed." At that point, aware of his own inexorable fate, Moro saw Andreotti as bearing by far the heaviest responsibility for his own imminent death: "Andreotti has always been in power, his origins are somewhat to the right... Now he is following a hard line in relation to the Red Brigades, with the intention of sacrificing without scruple the person who was patron and organiser of the present government accords."²

Whilst Moro may have been the first public figure with a close link to Andreotti to die a violent death, he was by no means the last - the journalist, Mino Pecorelli (1979); the police chief, Carlo Alberto Dalla Chiesa (1982); the crooked financiers, sometimes known as 'god's bankers', Roberto Calvi (1982) and Michele Sindona (1986); and Andreotti's Sicilian political lieutenant, Salvo Lima (1992) being the most notorious. The most comprehensive list of possible victims is given in Paolo Sorrentino's magnificent 2008 biopic *Il divo*, the screening of which Andreotti is said to have walked out of. Lima was killed by the Mafia as a warning to Andreotti, whom the now dominant Corleone Mafia faction regarded as having betrayed them for failing to get the convictions of scores of major Mafia bosses overturned in 1992 in the way they had expected. However, the earlier deaths have often, rightly or wrongly, been laid at his door,³ even if he was only ever put on trial for one of them, the murder of Mino Pecorelli, for which he was convicted in November 2002, although that verdict was overturned in October 2003.

US link

Andreotti dominated the Italian political scene - demonstrated by his seven premierships, concentrated into three periods (1972-73, 1976-79 and 1989-92). However, whilst there can be little dispute that no major Italian politician of national, as opposed to purely regional Sicilian, standing has ever had such close and longstanding links with



Andreotti: seven times PM

the Mafia, that connection - and the substantial Sicilian electoral base it gave to this most Roman of all Italian politicians - is not the only reason for his dominance. During the cold war, Andreotti was the key link man between the Italian political establishment and the Americans, especially the military and secret services. This linkage was built up during his extraordinarily long tenure, by Italian standards, as minister of defence in 1959-66 - a period marked by the De Lorenzo coup attempt of 1964.

Without American protection, his long immunity from serious judicial investigation is incomprehensible - his crimes were of a different order from the usual mundane corruption of most Italian politicians of the First Republic. It was clearly the decision of the Americans to throw him to the wolves in 1993 - whether because of his public revelations in 1990 of Nato's long denied Operation Gladio, because of his pro-Arab stance as foreign minister in 1983-89 or simply because a disintegrating Christian Democracy was no longer of any practical use is unclear - that precipitated the spate of accusations by Mafia *pentiti* (supergrasses).

This link with the Americans may, at least in part, explain Andreotti's role in the Moro affair, which, even allowing for some rivalry between the two Christian Democrat leaders, seemed an odd way to return the favour that Moro had showed in engineering Andreotti's return to the premiership in 1976. It is now quite clear that, whether or not the Americans had any role in Moro's initial kidnapping, they decided relatively early in his captivity that Moro had to die - as the relatively recent interview given by Steve Pieczenik, the former deputy secretary of state in the US government, has confirmed.⁴ Moro had on an official visit to Washington in September 1974 been given a stern warning by Henry Kissinger about his willingness to compromise with the Partito Comunista Italiano, which Moro's widow always believed to constitute a direct threat to his life. As she explained to an Italian Senate Commission many years ago, "It's one of the few occasions when my husband told me exactly what had been said to him, without telling me the name of the person concerned. I will try and repeat it now: You must abandon your policy of bringing all the political forces in your country into direct collaboration. Either you give this up or you will pay dearly for it."⁵

Whilst the death of Moro may have been decided in Washington, some subsequent killings seem to fit into a pattern of more personal and purely Italian vendettas. Pecorelli seems to have been making various

damaging, if often coded accusations, including about both the Moro affair, against Andreotti - accusations which could have had grave effects on the politician's career. Nonetheless, even in this instance there may have been some American complicity. In one of his last articles, published on January 16 1979, Pecorelli had written: "... we will talk about Steve R Pieczenik ... who participated for three weeks in the interior ministry's expert meetings, then returned to America before Moro was killed, and reported to Congress that the measures taken by Cossiga on the Moro affair were the best possible in the circumstances."⁶

Pecorelli was shot in the mouth, the Mafia's classical way of punishing those who break its code of silence. But, regardless of who actually fired the fatal shot, the motivation was clearly political - it was obviously some sort of contract killing, not an internal Mafia matter. He was a little known and rather shady and ambiguous figure, as much of a blackmailer as a genuine investigative journalist, and his often coded articles were for the obscure, small-circulation periodical, *Osservatorio Politico*, so his murder was not a major news item at a time when terrorist killings still dominated the headlines.

The death of the carabinieri general, Carlo Alberto Dalla Chiesa, was a rather more dramatic public event. In 1982 the government appointed him prefect of Palermo to deal with the 'second Mafia war'. Just before taking up the post, Dalla Chiesa had a meeting with Andreotti, at which the general indicated he would take action against any Sicilian Christian Democrat politicians linked with the Mafia. Dalla Chiesa's diary indicated Andreotti got very angry on this occasion, but Andreotti always denied the meeting had ever occurred. In a note dated April 2 1982 to the then prime minister, Giovanni Spadolini, Dalla Chiesa wrote that the Sicilian current linked to Andreotti was the most infiltrated by the Mafia of all the DC factions on the island.

By September of that year Dalla Chiesa had been ambushed in his car in the centre of Palermo and shot dead, together with his wife. On the face of it, it looked as if the Sicilian Mafia had decided that the tough policeman, already very famous for his ruthless and effective crackdown on the Red Brigades, was taking his new job far too seriously and had to be eliminated before he weakened their hold on the island. Andreotti's involvement could be explained as a product of his need to protect his Sicilian political associates, who were closely intertwined with the mobsters. This is more or less what was alleged by Dalla Chiesa's son, Nando, in his book about his father's killing.⁷

However, there is an alternative explanation - in which the Mafia play a less central role, even if they would doubtless have found the elimination of somebody they would in any event have regarded as an over-zealous policeman a rather congenial task. This second explanation hinges on Dalla Chiesa's knowledge of the murkier aspects of the Moro affair. According to Mino Pecorelli's sister, Dalla Chiesa met Pecorelli, who was a fellow member of a masonic lodge, a few days before the latter was assassinated and in the course of this meeting Pecorelli gave Dalla Chiesa several documents containing serious accusations against Andreotti. Moreover, on his death bed in 1993, Andreotti's longstanding political

collaborator, Franco Evangelisti, described to a journalist an alleged secret meeting between Andreotti and Dalla Chiesa, during which the latter had shown Andreotti Moro's complete statement to the Red Brigades, containing 'dangerous revelations' about Andreotti.

The key point here is that the more complete version of Moro's memorial and prison letters were only 'found' and published in 1990 - having, according to the unbelievable official version, somehow escaped detection in a thorough police search of the very same Milanese apartment in 1978 - long after Dalla Chiesa's death in 1982. So this account suggests that Dalla Chiesa, far from being a police investigator of unimpeachable integrity, had, for a period at least, colluded with Andreotti in the cover-up of the Moro affair, something which he might have been able to use against Andreotti, had he lived.

Bankers' demise

If the Pecorelli murder for which Andreotti was tried and the Dalla Chiesa murder of which he was accused, either implicitly or explicitly, by a variety of authors are the most spectacular deaths associated with him in the years after Aldo Moro's untimely end, the murder/suicide of the two crooked bankers, Roberto Calvi and Michele Sindona, are also worthy of some attention.

It ought to be stressed that both had very strong Vatican connections and that by the 1970s Andreotti, who attended mass without fail at 6am every morning and cultivated each successive pope with boundless devotion was the DC politician with the closest direct links to the Vatican hierarchy. Despite this religiosity, Andreotti's claim that "I must say, I met Mother Teresa much more often than I met Sindona or Calvi" has as much credibility as his claim never to have met the notorious Salvo cousins - a pair of Mafiosi who for many years had the contract for state tax collection in Sicily and with whom Andreotti appeared in a number of photographs, doubtless by pure chance.

Roberto Calvi's death under Blackfriars Bridge still remains a mystery - in part because of the apparent incompetence of the City of London police, who instantly assumed that the banker had hanged himself and failed to notice the bricks in his pockets or marks around his neck consistent with strangulation.⁸ Sindona, who in 1984 had been arrested, brought back to Italy from the USA and sentenced to life imprisonment for fraudulent bankruptcy and the assassination of lawyer Giorgio Ambrosoli, was killed by a poisoned cup of coffee in Voghera prison in March 1986. Journalist and university professor Sergio Turone has suggested that Andreotti had a role in providing the poisoned sugar that caused Sindona's death, after convincing the banker that it would cause him only to faint, and this would help him to be returned to the US. According to Turone, Andreotti feared Sindona would reveal dangerous details about his past life, because Sindona's criminal conviction had shown him that Andreotti had stopped supporting him.

It is worth noting that Ambrosoli's son, the unsuccessful centre-left candidate for the Lombard regional presidency this February, walked out of a sitting of the regional council when it decided upon a few minutes' silence in Andreotti's honour last week. The implication being that he

held Andreotti responsible for his father's murder, whether because of Andreotti's friendship with Sindona or more directly is not clear. Ambrosoli senior had been shot dead by three Mafia hit men commissioned by Sindona, but shortly before Ambrosoli's death he received a threatening phone call invoking Andreotti's name, which he taped; conveniently the American Mafioso at the end of the line fell to his death whilst trying to escape from a New York jail in 1984.

As stated above, in one of the often bizarre verdicts of the Cassazione (supreme court), Andreotti's conviction for the murder of Pecorelli was overturned in 2003. However, contrary to what his apologists and many confused and ignorant journalists have claimed, Andreotti was *not* formally acquitted of Mafia involvement in another court hearing in 2003. Indeed the court verdict established that Andreotti had had strong ties to the Mafia until 1980 and had used them to further his political career to such an extent as to be considered part of the Mafia itself - in fact he had had "friendly and even direct ties" with Mafia boss Stefano Bontade. However, the statute of limitations applied to an offence committed more than 20 years earlier, so that no legal punishment could be imposed.

Whilst it may perhaps be true that there was some conflict between Andreotti and the Mafia over a failed attempt on his part to save Piersanti Mattarella, a reformist DC president of the Sicilian region, from assassination, Andreotti did not break off relations with the Mafia for about another decade, perhaps not until early 1992 - although some have suggested that the break may have come slightly earlier, as European Union, and particularly German, pressure on the Italian government to do something about the Mafia had started to mount.

Although Andreotti was involved in various corruption scandals - probably to pay for factional intrigues and to buy support - he seems to have been primarily interested in power, not money, and does not seem to have indulged in the luxurious lifestyle associated with so many Italian politicians of both left and right. However, whilst he lacked the ostentatious vulgarity associated with Berlusconi, no-one should forget his vile crimes - let alone indulge in nauseating apologetics of the kind that marked Donald Sassoon's eulogy in *The Guardian* ●

Notes

1. See Donald Sassoon's obituary in *The Guardian* (May 6) for an attempt to whitewash him.
2. Translations taken from P Willan *Puppetmasters: the political use of terrorism in Italy* New York 2002, p276. Whilst it could be argued that not every assertion is reliably sourced, it should be far more widely read than it has been.
3. As Andreotti famously remarked, "Aside from the Punic Wars, for which I was too young, I have been blamed for everything else."
4. Pieczenik's interview was part of a French documentary film, which became the basis of the book by Emmanuel Amara, *Abbiamo ucciso Aldo Moro* (Rome 2008). Pieczenik has given mutually contradictory accounts of his own role in the Moro affair to various journalists over the years and been unwilling to appear before any Italian parliamentary or judicial investigation. He has also made bizarre assertions about Osama bin Laden and other matters unrelated to the Moro affair, so doubtless some will argue he is an unreliable witness. But what he told Amara is more detailed and plausible than any other version he has ever provided.
5. Translation taken from Willan *op cit* p220.
6. *Ibid* pp244-45.
7. N Dalla Chiesa *Delitto imperfetto* Milan 1984.
8. For further details about the case, see P Willan *The last supper: the Mafia, the masons and the killing of Roberto Calvi* London 2007.

IRAN

Boycott the vetted election,



Hashemi Rafsanjani: last-minute capitalist candidate

The Islamic republic is bitterly divided at the top and subject to crippling international sanctions. **Yassamine Mather** analyses the political situation in the run-up to the June 14 presidential poll

On the last available day, ayatollah Hashemi Rafsanjani arrived at the ministry of the interior to register himself as a presidential candidate. Rafsanjani was the Islamic republic's fourth president, from 1989 to 1997, and is now once again standing as a 'reformist'. In reality he is the candidate of capitalism and probably still one of the richest men in Iran. Despite that, the announcement that Rafsanjani had entered the race 'to save the country' generated an almost unprecedented hysteria.

There are two main explanations for his timing. The principlists (conservative, hard-line supporters of the supreme leader, ayatollah Ali Khamenei) are accusing Rafsanjani (also known as the fox because of his political cunning) of holding back before making his dramatic, last-minute move in order to surprise and spread confusion amongst his opponents. There is some truth to this claim: confident of an easy ride, principlists entered the presidential elections with at least seven serious candidates, and another 14 less serious contenders. One assumes that, had they known they would be facing such a figure, they would have tried to rally round a single candidate.

Some of Rafsanjani's allies have claimed he was waiting for the approval of the supreme leader before putting himself forward. Two weeks ago he said he would only go ahead if Khamenei wanted him to do so, but a few days later there was a slightly different version: he would only put his name forward if the supreme leader did not object

to his nomination. His telephone conversation with Khamenei¹ or one of his close advisers² (depending on which version you read) only took place at 4.30pm Tehran time on May 11 - less than one and a half hours before the deadline. Rafsanjani's daughter confirms this.³

Whatever the truth, Rafsanjani, who is now benefiting from the full support of the 'reformist camp' led by Mohammad Khatami, is no opponent of the Islamic regime. In fact he does not even claim to be a reformist: he is, in his own words, a "moderate". Some consider him to be a "pragmatist conservative"⁴ - someone who tried to mediate between the 'reformists' and the conservatives after the debacle of the 2009 elections. Now he has, according to Khatami (Iran's last 'reformist' president) made a "major sacrifice" and come forward to fulfil his duty to the "nation, the Islamic Republic and the faith".

It is clear then that, far from providing a challenge to Khamenei, Rafsanjani is standing to save the clerical system and with it its supreme leader, who, after all, owes his own position to Rafsanjani. According to a video released in 1989, soon after ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini's death, "Rafsanjani took the lead in a meeting of the assembly of experts". He described his last encounter at Khomeini's hospital bedside, as well as an earlier discussion he had had with the Islamic republic's first supreme leader over his succession. Rafsanjani claimed he had told Khomeini that no-one had "the stature to fill your shoes", to which Khomeini had replied: "But why not?

Mr Khamenei is the one!"⁵

Rafsanjani's message to the supreme leader and the conservatives is clear: the regime is facing its most serious crisis ever, sanctions have paralysed the economy, international relations are at an all-time low, and then there are the idiotic holocaust-denial statements that still come from president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad and his allies. One needs to "drink the poison" - a reference to Khomeini's famous statement when he accepted the resolution passed by the United Nations security council in 1987 to end the Iran-Iraq war.⁶ (Of course, many believe that it was Rafsanjani who, as commander-in-chief of Iran's military forces during the eight-year war, convinced Khomeini to accept that ceasefire.) Iran's "moderate" presidential candidate is also in favour of direct talks with the US to resolve the nuclear issue and there is a precedent for this: it is alleged that Rafsanjani was one of many Iranian politicians who got involved in 'Irangate', the secret deal with the Reagan administration which saw Iran being sold arms despite an embargo.⁷

Although it is unlikely that the Council of Guardians - the religious body responsible for vetting election candidates - will find sufficient reason to eliminate Rafsanjani from standing in the June elections, there are no guarantees that he would get sufficient votes, real or 'engineered', to win.

US victory

Now that his nomination is in, every one of his recent and not so recent statements is being analysed and it

is clear that, like every other serious candidate ('reformist', 'moderate' or principlist conservative), he is advocating a U-turn as far as the nuclear issue is concerned. This is, above all, a victory for the United States, which it will use to demonstrate that sanctions against 'third-rate rogue states' work. Although we in Hands Off the People of Iran have always opposed Iran's nuclear programme, we refuse to join those celebrating the US victory in bringing a country to its knees.

Iranians have paid a heavy price for the foolish policies of their leaders. Sanctions have immiserated the working class, impoverished the middle class, made the already disastrous unemployment situation even worse and caused spiralling inflation, currently estimated at above 32% by the Islamic parliament's economic commission. As we predicted - in a neoliberal religious dictatorship, where the clergy and Islamic revolutionary guards are the main beneficiaries of privatisation - 'targeted sanctions' against the 'rulers of the country' are in fact sanctions against the entire population: 70 million Iranians are now facing the consequences of a deliberate, callous policy by a superpower to assert its authority. Yet most Iranians believe worse is yet to come - fear of becoming 'another Iraq or Syria' dominates people's minds and that is one explanation why so many are willing to forget Rafsanjani's horrific record.

Iran's richest man is no friend of the Iranian working class. According to an updated biography on the BBC

website, "Mr Rafsanjani has close links to Iranian industry and business ... He was featured in the 'Millionaire mullahs' section of the Forbes Rich List in 2003".⁸ Most of this fortune was accumulated after 1979, although he denies the fact that his political connections were in any way used to help him.

So far Rafsanjani has given no clue as to his economic plans, but his record is clear. He implemented the free market, privatisation and deregulation. Since Rafsanjani's presidency, economic policy has been based on a reduction in government spending, itself fuelling inflation, as successive governments printed money to finance deficits and worsened the imbalance in foreign trade by encouraging imports and overall economic dependence on a single product: oil. It was immediately after the 1980-88 Iran-Iraq war and during Rafsanjani's presidency that the government started subsidising foreign goods to the benefit of the urban rich, while allocating resources to commerce and finance at the expense of production. So we can expect more of the same if Rafsanjani is returned to power. In other words, for all the promises of saving the economy, the nation and the Islamic republic, the population can expect better times for the rich but even worse times for the poor.

Rafsanjani is a firm supporter of the Islamic regime's constitution and therefore believes democratic rights should be limited to those who support the current order. In the early 2000s he came in for a lot of criticism from the 'reformist' media

What we fight for

■ Without organisation the working class is nothing; with the highest form of organisation it is everything.

■ There exists no real Communist Party today. There are many so-called 'parties' on the left. In reality they are confessional sects. Members who disagree with the prescribed 'line' are expected to gag themselves in public. Either that or face expulsion.

■ Communists operate according to the principles of democratic centralism. Through ongoing debate we seek to achieve unity in action and a common world outlook. As long as they support agreed actions, members should have the right to speak openly and form temporary or permanent factions.

■ Communists oppose all imperialist wars and occupations but constantly strive to bring to the fore the fundamental question - ending war is bound up with ending capitalism.

■ Communists are internationalists. Everywhere we strive for the closest unity and agreement of working class and progressive parties of all countries. We oppose every manifestation of national sectionalism. It is an internationalist duty to uphold the principle, 'One state, one party'.

■ The working class must be organised globally. Without a global Communist Party, a Communist International, the struggle against capital is weakened and lacks coordination.

■ Communists have no interest apart from the working class as a whole. They differ only in recognising the importance of Marxism as a guide to practice. That theory is no dogma, but must be constantly added to and enriched.

■ Capitalism in its ceaseless search for profit puts the future of humanity at risk. Capitalism is synonymous with war, pollution, exploitation and crisis. As a global system capitalism can only be superseded globally.

■ The capitalist class will never willingly allow their wealth and power to be taken away by a parliamentary vote.

■ We will use the most militant methods objective circumstances allow to achieve a federal republic of England, Scotland and Wales, a united, federal Ireland and a United States of Europe.

■ Communists favour industrial unions. Bureaucracy and class compromise must be fought and the trade unions transformed into schools for communism.

■ Communists are champions of the oppressed. Women's oppression, combating racism and chauvinism, and the struggle for peace and ecological sustainability are just as much working class questions as pay, trade union rights and demands for high-quality health, housing and education.

■ Socialism represents victory in the battle for democracy. It is the rule of the working class. Socialism is either democratic or, as with Stalin's Soviet Union, it turns into its opposite.

■ Socialism is the first stage of the worldwide transition to communism - a system which knows neither wars, exploitation, money, classes, states nor nations. Communism is general freedom and the real beginning of human history.

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not the mass protests

inside Iran. In a series of articles, later published as a book, former revolutionary guard Akbar Ganji called him the "red eminence"⁹ - a reference to cardinal Richelieu, Louis XIII's prime minister, who was supposed to be a ruthless politician more powerful than the king. During Khatami's presidency (1997-2005), Ganji and others in the 'reformist media' presented Rafsanjani as the man behind the "serial political murders" of writers and intellectuals.¹⁰

In 2009, his lukewarm protest against the incarceration of 'reformist' activists and leaders angered the supreme leader and lost him his post as chairman of the powerful assembly of experts. Even then his proclamations were limited to 'moderate' statements on the poor state of some of Iran's jails and the fact that the 'reformists' did not deserve quite such harsh treatment.

Principlist splits

Let me stress that principlist candidates also want 'meaningful negotiations' with the US. In fact, now that the crippling effects of sanctions is recognised by all, it is no surprise that they too are promising a speedy resolution of the nuclear issue.

Sections of the principlist factions have been in discussions to support a common candidate. However, continued ideological disagreements, as well as uncertainty about the calibre of the likely 'reformist' opponent, meant that they failed to come up with a single name, or at least just fewer candidates.

There is a Jewish joke about the propensity of Jews to fall out over religious issues, leading to one split after another: if there are two Jews in a village, they will need a synagogue each. Shia Muslims are exactly the same, it seems - the more religious they are, the more inflexible they appear to be regarding both theological and in consequence political matters. In Iran's parliament we have the Principlist faction (not to be confused with the principlists), the Stability Front of the Islamic Revolution and five other major principlist groups. Since Rafsanjani's surprise registration, there is talk of the supporters of Mohammad Qalibaf, Ali-Akbar Velayati, Gholam-Ali Haddad-Adel, Ali Fallahian and Saeed Jalili trying to come up with a name. However, many doubt that all the conservative factions will be prepared to withdraw their candidates.

As for the current president, now totally at odds with the supreme leader, Ahmadinejad has over the last few months made a number of provincial visits accompanied by his relative and 'heir apparent', Esfandiar Rahim Mashaei. These unofficial pre-election occasions were mocked by state press and media loyal to Khamenei, especially when it became clear that very few people were attending. Going for smaller venues did not help much - there were lots of empty seats even when they were held in somewhere less ambitious than Tehran's Azadi stadium, where the first such meeting was held. MPs in the majles (Islamic parliament) accuse Ahmadinejad of using state funds to pay for what they allege amounts to a countrywide election tour for Mashaei.

Over the last few months principlist/conservative MPs have tried on a number of occasions to dismiss the president or his close allies in the government. Whereas

in 2009, at the height of the protest movement, Ahmadinejad enjoyed the full support of the conservative/principlist factions, today less than four years later, he and his supporters are openly called the "deviant faction", mainly because Ahmadinejad believes Mashaei's claims to have a special relationship with the 12th Shia Imam (who fell down a well 13 centuries ago and is soon going to be resurrected to save the world). This has led some prominent ayatollahs to call him a heretic - the claim is totally abhorrent to supporters of the supreme leader, who is, after all, the only human being capable of communicating with the imam. But, trying to broaden his appeal, Mashaei also claims to be a nationalist. He and Ahmadinejad have actually been promoting Iranianism over and above Islam - in 2010 Mashaei claimed that without Iran Islam would be lost and other Islamic countries feared Iran, which upheld the only "truthful" version of Islam.

However, like Rafsanjani and the principlists, Mashaei is also keen on improving relations with the US and Israel. In fact he has gone further than anyone else on the subject of Iran-Israel relations, making comments that have angered senior clerics: Iranians are "friends of all people in the world - even Israelis", he said.¹¹ A phrase that lost him his job as vice-president. In the early years of Ahmadinejad's second term the conservative factions in parliament and powerful supporters of Khamenei tried their best to convince Ahmadinejad to distance himself from Mashaei, but he refused. This produced a conservative backlash. The head of the revolutionary guards, general Hassan Firouzabadi, branded Mashaei's comments a "crime against national security", while a senior ayatollah claimed that "equating the school of Iran and the school of Islam amounts to pagan nationalism".¹²

To add insult to injury, on May 11 the Iranian president accompanied Mashaei to the ministry of the interior to register him as a candidate. As they were making their way to the relevant office, a scuffle broke out between Ahmadinejad's entourage and conservative MP Hassan Ghadiri. The set-to was photographed on a mobile phone and immediately posted on Facebook. Then, to make matters worse, before Mashaei took the microphone to address his first election press conference as a candidate, Ahmadinejad, unaware a microphone was live, could be heard next to him whispering: "Say the president is on leave today". Of course, Mashaei obliged and started the press conference exactly as instructed. Again this gaffe was filmed on YouTube and made it to most news broadcasts.¹³ If this was not enough, the guardian council announced on May 12 that it might charge Ahmadinejad with violating electoral rules by accompanying his protégée to the interior ministry.¹⁴

A total of 686 candidates have registered. No doubt the guardian council will reduce that to half a dozen or so. However, because of the large number, the council says the process may require more time.

First to be struck off will be the 30 women who have put themselves forward, unless they manage to prove to the guardian council that they have gone through transgender operations in the last few days. Iran's Islamic constitution is quite clear on this. According to article 115, "The president must be elected from among religious and political *male*

personalities (the Arabic word *rejal* is used) possessing the following qualifications: Iranian origin; Iranian nationality; administrative capacity and resourcefulness; a good past record; trustworthiness and piety; belief in the fundamental principles of the Islamic Republic of Iran and the official religion of the country".¹⁵

As if this vetting process were not enough for the religious rulers, they have other tricks up their sleeve. Following accusations of election-rigging in 2009, the Iranian regime has come up with a new term for state interference in the electoral process, which is now openly talked about as a possibility. In January one of Khamenei's representatives, Hojat Al-Islam Saeedi, said that it was the responsibility of the revolutionary guards to "rationally and logically engineer the elections".¹⁶

Boycott

There is considerable enthusiasm for Rafsanjani amongst the reformist left - all his past sins seem to have been forgotten. It is true that the threat of war against Iran persists; sanctions, another form of war, have paralysed the economy; the smell of partition is in the air; and the country is on the edge of a precipice. However, we should remind all those who believe Rafsanjani's claim that better relations with the US will end the sanctions and the threat of war that there are two sides to this equation. The US and its allies have their own reasons for continued confrontation, especially at a time of severe economic crisis, irrespective of which ayatollah is in control.

Rafsanjani is a class enemy. We have the responsibility to remind everyone that the leaders of the Green movement, including Rafsanjani, acted like the grand old duke of York and there is no reason to believe they will behave differently this time. In fact this time there is a difference: in order to avoid upsetting the supreme leader, Rafsanjani does not want to encourage any mass protests. As one website put it, "Rafsanjani hopes to revive the enthusiasm of the 2009 election ... minus the demonstrations!"¹⁷

It is not surprising that none of the candidates in Iran's presidential elections, even before the vetting has weeded out those considered untrustworthy, mentions unemployment, mass non-payment of wages, 'white contracts' for temporary jobs and other issues that affect the majority of Iran's population, the working class and the poor. If you read the various election manifestos issued in the last few days in Tehran, you would think that inflation, sanctions and the terrible economic conditions only affect the

middle classes and the wealthy. In an election already known to be prone to "engineering" by revolutionary guards, where only male supporters of an Islamic constitution can become candidates, the genuine left has only one option: to boycott the elections and continue the call for the overthrow of Iran's Islamic regime, together with all its myriad factions and tendencies.

For all the claims that these elections will 'save Iran from the abyss', improve relations with the outside world and end sanctions, three of the prominent candidates - Rafsanjani, Velayati and Fallahian - were implicated in the Mykonos trials¹⁸ of those accused of murdering Kurdish Democratic Party leaders in Berlin in 1982. Rafsanjani was president, Velayati foreign minister and Fallahian intelligence minister. So it is possible that Iran will end up with a president wanted by Interpol and incapable of travelling to many western countries. These factions might be at war with each other now, but let us not forget that were united in crime not that long ago.

Having said all that, it is very likely that protests against the guardian council's vetting or vote-rigging, as in 2009, will cause anger and protests in Tehran and other large Iranian cities. We should not ignore such protests - boycotting the elections does not mean boycotting those who, in desperation, will try and vote for the 'least worst' candidate ●

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Notes

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May '68 and its lessons

Saturday May 25, 12 noon

London Communist Forum,
Lucas Arms, 245a Grays Inn Rd,
London WC1

(Kings Cross tube).

Speaker: Mike Macnair, CPGB.

"The events of the year 1968 were not, except in a very limited sense, a 1905, a dress rehearsal for a coming 1917 revolution of similar shape (either globally or in Europe). Rather, they were the upshot of the policies and political dynamics of the cold war, and part of the causes of the turn of international capital away from these policies."

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weekly Worker

He dabbled in
socialism in
his youth

Icon of football's big money

The departure of Alex Ferguson from football management has generated more column inches than a royal wedding. **Harley Filben** asks why

The unthinkable has happened. Referees will sleep easier in their beds. Rival teams will dare to relax after the clock strikes 88 minutes. Stress levels on newspaper sports desks will plummet.

Alex Ferguson has announced his retirement, and we are all the poorer for it - Manchester United fans, supporters of rival clubs whose torture of Glaswegian voodoo dolls has come to naught over the last quarter-century, and the very small proportion of those who follow English football with no interest either way. Doubters as to the significance of this event should simply consult last Thursday's papers (May 9), accompanied by a shower of pull-out supplements that makes press coverage of a royal wedding look positively restrained.

Football, like most things worth paying attention to in human culture, has an importance wildly disproportionate to the actual stakes of the game itself. Fundamentally, it is a contest between two teams of a seemingly arbitrary size to see which of them can most competently hoik an *ersatz* pig's bladder between two goalposts without the use of their hands. It has its roots in pre-modern peasant sports, though the modern game is unrecognisable by comparison.

Its power, like the power of all mass culture, comes from its ability to take a pre-modern set of rituals with its attendant structure of feeling and industrialise it - kicking a ball has become a religion and an outpost of finance capital, a heroic epic and a bureaucratic farce; the feats of its protagonists inspire in the audience ecstasy and abjection alike, with the alternation between the two set to the schizophrenic pace of the mass media.

It was never separable from the broader history in which it is imbricated, but football is probably now more heteronomous than ever. The significance of Alex Ferguson lies in his part in bringing this state of affairs about.

Ferguson began his managerial career in 1974, at the relatively young age of 32. He ends it at the exceptionally old age (in a profession not noted for being especially relaxing) of 71. That period, just shy of four decades, spans the prehistory, gestation and birth of the current epoch of English football - what you might call its financialisation. His relation to this transition is two-sided: Ferguson was carried along by events that, in his quarter-century tenure at Manchester United, he helped to shape.

Born to a Glasgow dockworkers' family, his humble origins are well-known, as are his socialist convictions - while barely visible in recent decades, except by adding additional vituperation to already existing grudges (the spat with Real Madrid over Cristiano Ronaldo being a case in point), Ferguson's left views at one point in his youth brought him into the orbit of the International Socialists, forerunners of today's Socialist Workers Party, along with several others among the Glasgow dockers.

This flirtation does not seem to have survived far into his playing career, as an accomplished striker at the top tier of Scottish football with Dunfermline and Rangers, among others. After making

the switch to management, success came quickly - he led his second club, St Mirren (the only club ever to sack him), from third-tier doldrums to the Scottish First Division title in four years. He then took control at Aberdeen, and in his second season steered them to the League title, a feat he was to repeat twice, with a European Cup into the bargain, during his time there.

His move to Manchester United saw little success in initial years, resulting in fans calling for him to be dismissed; winning the FA Cup in 1990 eased the pressure somewhat. It would be three more years before he brought his team to a league title.

Moneyball

By then, however, it was a different league. The Football Association made the decision to spin off the top-flight division into its own, semi-autonomous institution: the Premiership. This was no superficial name-change; the Premier League was a limited company in its own right, and represented a compromise between the top English clubs (10 of which had previously threatened to break away and form a 'super league') and the FA.

The reason was painfully simple: money. It was flowing into the game far faster than in the 1980s, particularly due to rising revenues from television. The Premiership turned this flow into a torrent. A year before, Rupert Murdoch had added a sports channel to his Sky satellite TV service; he pounced on the fledgling league with a £302 million bid for exclusive broadcasting rights (Sky and others have recently paid an astonishing £6 billion for rights over the next three years, which tells you everything about where football is going).

Ferguson's United, by accident or design, ended up in lock-step with football history. Ever since, Man U has unquestionably been the dominant team in England. Serious challengers to that dominance have arisen, one after the other, but all have faded away (we will see if over-

moneyed local rivals Manchester City have any staying power).

The old socialist found himself the public figurehead of what became, inevitably, a global business empire. Barely a decade after the Hillsborough disaster exposed dilapidated stadia and widespread contempt for 'oikish' football fans, Premiership football had become a star-studded spectacle, with teams competing to throw ever more stupid amounts of money at transfers, bigger and better grounds to play on, and a larger layer of 'casual' support. In the mid-1980s, it was customary for Tory grandees to bristle with snobbish contempt at the unwashed hooligans who played - and watched - football. By the end of the next decade, Tony Blair was desperately attempting to convince people he supported Newcastle United; and now, having a favourite team (preferably local to your constituency) is on every bourgeois politician's 'how to convince people you share their concerns' checklist.

Sky TV gave this glamorous new product a media platform. Manchester United was the deluxe item in the shop window. United's runaway success is so bound up with this whole transformation that BSkyB - Sky's successor - attempted a takeover at the turn of the millennium (quashed by the competition commission). It has instead ended up, like all elite clubs in England, under the tutelage of big capital, in the form of food-processing magnate Malcolm Glazer.

If Ferguson is the iconic individual of English football's big-money era, however, he and his team have also always been a bit askew from a pattern which is only now fully taking shape. While the transfer market became absurdly inflated in the mid-1990s, United has never been as reliant on the immediate vicissitudes of cash flow as the teams that have snapped at their heels and overtaken them at times. Many, perhaps most, of the iconic names of the Ferguson era -

Ryan Giggs, Paul Scholes, Roy Keane - either began their careers as United youngsters, or were brought in early for relatively low fees.

And, while United was at the vanguard of the gentrification of the game, bringing a new middle class and corporate audience into uneasy coexistence with traditional working class support on the stands, it was a United player - Keane - who crystallised that unease in a typically furious outburst about that audience's fondness for "prawn sandwiches".

Nostalgia

Linked to this is a certain concern about what Ferguson's retirement actually means - not just for United, but for English football as a whole. It is clear what the general assessment of those special colour supplements is - there will never be another one like him. It is not his talent that is unique, however (undeniable though that talent is). It is his longevity.

It is barely conceivable that anyone else will be allowed, in the contemporary game, to become so established. The new big-money owners, so goes the pundit's moan, are impatient. They throw hundreds of millions of pounds into the transfer kitty, and expect the manager to turn that into very rapid success; they also feel more entitled than ever to interfere with events on the pitch.

Ferguson built success by maintaining total dictatorial control over every aspect of the club's life that could at all plausibly fall into his remit - transfers, youth training and everything else. Even top-level managers are now frequently expected to work under a director of football, or some other interfering representative of the owners.

It is this sense in which Ferguson and Manchester United were a mechanism of transition from an older, rawer English football to the present era of filthy lucre - perhaps the first global footballing brand, they advertised the Premier League to the world's plutocrats, but did not quite become the plaything

of a Roman Abramovich themselves. Ferguson's departure thus troubles football culture, because it is indicative of the increasingly rigid, money-fuelled stratification of the game.

The nostalgic response is inevitable, and complex. People mourn the death of football's more populist past, when the gulf between club owners and 'ordinary' fans - the bridging of which falls uneasily to the team and manager - at least *seemed* smaller. Yet this becomes identified with other nostalgic images which may crudely be called reactionary: a disdain for 'effete' (and usually foreign) players who dive too easily, as against the more rough-and-ready physicality of an earlier era; a veneration of the strong-man manager, who rallies his players with encouragement and terror alike. The latter, certainly, is the abiding image of 'Furious Fergie'.

There are those on the left - idiots, mostly - whose image of a liberated society is one in which football does not exist; or, worse, one where all competitive sport is supplanted by an arid regime of mass callisthenics. The truth is that we do not know what culture will be thrown up by broader society, should the revolutionary project succeed.

We can guarantee that football itself will be liberated from its current status as a particularly absurd form of conspicuous consumption for people with too much money and nowhere else to blow it, from the incompetent bureaucracies like Fifa and the FA that do little other than interpose themselves between the game and the masses who keep it alive.

Whether that will mean, equally, the final demise of the Alex Fergusons of this world - dictatorial management, the half-time hair-dryer treatment - or their full re-emergence, is open to dispute. In the degraded current state of football, the dressing-room strongman will neither survive nor be replaced by anything better. Behind the glitz, English football is in a bubble, culturally and financially. The old is dying, and the new cannot yet be born ●

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